ROINN COSANTA.

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

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Witness

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Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'C' Company, 1st Battalion, Dublin Brigade, 1914- ;

O/C. 'C' Company, 1st Battalion, Dublin Brigade, I.R.A. 1922.

Subject.

The Civil War, 1922-1923.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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Form B.S.M. 2

Statement of
Captain Seán Prendergast, former Officer
Commanding C Company 1st Battalion Dublin Brigade
Irish Volunteers and Irish Republican Army

now of

30, Grace Park Terrace, Drumcondra, Dublin.

PART 2.

Chapter 27:

On Tuesday night, the 27th June, 1922, the Dublin Brigade I.R.A. was urgently mobilised for immediate action "as the Staters are going to attack the Four Courts". Conforming to that order, our 1st Battalion Commandant, Paddy Holohan, issued mobilisation orders to respective Companies, the main portion to report at 44, Parnell Square, others at the Fowler Hall and our "C" Coy. at Tara Hall in Gloucester Street. It so happened that at the time of the issuing of these orders, I and my two junior officers and one or two other members of the Coy. were at the Plaza picture house in Granby Row. Waylaid on leaving, we were served with the mobilising order, which we were inclined to treat as a huge joke. Joke it was not, as we soon learned and realised, for Pierce or Tommy Hoban, who was the bearer of the mobilisation order, furnished us with the information that the Coy of which he was a member ("H" Coy.), "B" Coy. and other units of the Battalion were well advanced in the plan to mobilise their men. We were, it seemed, more than an hour behind time in that, but it did not

take us more than a few minutes to get, what turned out to be, our speediest and most important mobilisation machinery into operation, because the main pivots were at hand - the Lieutenants to mobilise their half Companies and improvised arrangements to contact special personnel. Consequently, it only required the order "go ahead men" to get the order to mobilise into full swing - the rendezvous Tara Hall, Gloucester St. (now Seán McDermott St.).

What a rude awakening indeed! One moment we were in the height of merriment; the next plunged into the infernal affairs of an armed enterprise. Mobilise the men; every man to his allotted task! Soon the clarion call was brought to the four quarters of the city wherever our men lived, arranging the dispatch of all our warlike materials to the selected rendezvous. No more bewildered and inquisitive party paraded in that hall than ours on that fateful June night, as they arrived in ones and twos to give effect to the orders they had received.

"What's on? Is there going to be a fight" was on everybody's lips. "The order says the Courts are to be attacked to night" was the gist of information that was imparted to them by the officers. It was enough to make them realise that "something big was on". To all the more emphasise the seriousness of the position, we had been advised "to await further orders", words that conveyed to our alert official minds that a scrap of some sort was in sight. Was this to be the end of our day - dreams and our day-dreamings that we had been cherishing for some time back concerning reconciliation, unity or the settling of the differences

dividing us? Were our hopes at last to be dashed to the ground by the sudden and calamitous tornado that was, alas, sweeping across our path, only to bring strife, internecine strife, to us, to them and to our country? Confound the false prophets, the myriad hosts of optimists and sycophants who, having led us into believing that success was coming our way, brought us not peace, but the sword. Woe to the mealy mouthy politicians, the selfish political opportunists for their evil work. Well might we rant and rave over such things and because of such people, as we feverishly and determinedly prepared ourselves to enter another phase of the fight for the living Republic.

Placing guards at the entrance to the building, all the necessary arrangements to requisition all war-like stores, a task which in such circumstances would have devolved on our Coy Quartermaster but who, unfortunately, was engaged with the Battalion Quartermaster, much to our disadvantage; one of our Section Commanders was on sick leave - had been so for some time previously. We had to get out of those difficulties as best we could by devising expedients to meet our passing difficulties of mobilising all the men and arms of the Company.

The one extraordinary feature about our immediate position was - we were strangely, very strangely, isolated from our Battalion, and much too far away from our Battalion area. It was not only strange, it was aggravating. We could not be said to be happy about that arrangement. Anyway we had to bear these things, hoping, however, that later on matters would right themselves and we could, thereby, have a clearer vision, perception and understanding

of the general plan of campaign, as well as a closer association with the other units of our Battalion. This coming together in martial array resembled somewhat the outbreak of the Easter Week Rising. The similar enthusiasm, preparation and anticipation; distributing rifles, shotguns, revolvers and ammunition for each type; assembling and distributing grenades, arranging equipment, and the innumerable tasks associated with our class of citizen Volunteers, such as were needed to be attended to in a situation like that. When everything was ready the men and guns were inspected. One could not have anything but praise and admiration for the men; they were truly wonderful. But oh! What a vast contrast between them and their predecessors, the men of 1916, from the point of view of guns, the potential paraphernalia of war!

It was only when we beheld that array in the hands of the men - and, by the way, there was not enough to arm every one of them - that the full realisation of our weakness as a military force became manifest. Worse than all, we had only a very few modern service rifles. However, it was not our customary way to be despairing or to permit anything to overcome the proud spirit, the noble fervour and the high enthusiasm of the men involved in this enterprise, for even with such insufficient armaments, we knew the men were prepared for whatever was to come their way. All were truly grand, the junior officers, the Adjutant, the N.C.O.s, down to the most modest rank and filer. When eventually the excitement resulting from mobilisation, requisitioning and distribution of guns and arranging of men was over, we had time to spare for gossip and

conversation. Gossip indeed! Gossip that hinted "maybe it's only a false alarm after all". Strange how anyone in such a situation should utter words similar to my thoughts. - What if the mobilisation was either a test or a precaution, a test to try out our men, intended to find out if they would respond to the prospect of fighting for the things we held dear! Still, I could not help feeling that a move like this was only possible in an extreme emergency and for very important reasons - considering the whole Dublin Brigade was mobilised that night. Only the most serious business could have caused such a hustle and bustle in our camp.

We could be excused for thinking strange thoughts, for giving way to speculation and wondering what was really afoot. Whatever other things were in doubt, most of the men of the Coy. gave loyal response to the mobilisation. No doubt there were some wished otherwise than going to fight under such circumstances, and would rather have been called upon to fight an alien foe than native adversaries. Some would rather be in their homes, snug in bed, were there no threat of war or shadow of a conflict. Such are the peculiar workings of the human intellect, emotions and feelings, that even at such moments one's thoughts could entertain exorbitant flights of fancy over kith and kin and the natural order of things as they relate to human society and humankind. These came in flashes across the threshold of consciousness to form, as it were, a common bond of affection between the nearest and dearest, and to the exclusion of, and direct antagonism for, the bad on mother earth. Perhaps it has ever been so, that in the moments of great trial, of danger and of

perplexity, one's most intimate thoughts fleet in the direction of paternal and maternal cares, "dreaming sweet dreams of hearth and home" and of those so abruptly and momentarily left behind. But such moments for dreams or soliloquizing came in brief spells that night - a night of anticipation and preparation for the approaching fight.

By means of scouts operating outside our rendezvous, we were somewhat enabled to keep in touch with events and movements outside - movements of the Treaty forces and of our own, the I.R.A. Whatever doubts we had previously in regard to the imminence of fighting had long since dispelled. Something is going to happen! We could feel the throb of excitement each time our scouts reported the military movements in O'Connell St. and adjoining streets, great numbers of them, armoured cars and lorries plying hither and thither. Thought we, "these are no ordinary movements". There were too many men and too many cars for such. Even in the comparative stillness of early morning, and though we were a short distance removed from the scenes, the hustle and bustle associated with such warlike movements betokened a conflict.

Something is coming assuredly! Like a bolt from the blue an order arrives from our Commandant from his headquarters at 44 Parnell St., "move your Company to house at corner of Strand St. and Capel St.". As a first preliminary to our getting on the move scouts were sent out to reconnoitre, while our men prepared to give effect to the order to advance. "Staters very active in O'Connell St. and by-streets - droves of them", our scouts reported. We are

awaiting the return of a number of our men who had been sent out on various errands - to collect arms and equipment from repositories, dumps and houses, to contact absent members and to take possession of such materials from those who refused to turn out. Our position was none too promising from the material aspect. As we were perfecting our arrangements to move, a loud explosion resembling artillery fire was heard. It sounded convenient enough. Was the Courts being attacked? We are ready to move. Scouts still reporting increasing Staters' activity in O'Connell St. Would it not be suicide to try and run the gauntlet in the face of our sheer weakness and their vast strength, to match our poorly armed men against better equipped forces? We would surely be slaughtered if we made the attempt to get through to the goal more than a half mile away. We should have had to make that journey on foot, feeling our way pace by pace and without adequate supporting fire and protective cover, through the streets then being patrolled by the Staters. What a terrible dilemna to be placed in when every moment was valuable! It did not seem possible that we could or would fight our way through and get all our men safely at that allotted point. Even the junior officers expressed doubts on the propriety or the possibility of making the attempt.

Meanwhile our Commandant was communicated with and informed of the situation. Meanwhile the fight was on, as we were too well made aware of by the repeated crescendo of gun and rifle fire and machine gun, interspersed by the sounds of what appeared to be grenade detonations. That shooting seemed to come

from different parts of the city. As we were pinned to our position, improvised arrangements had to be made to put the building in some state of defence, while our scouts kept us informed of activity outside. Every moment that passed increased the difficulty of our moving to Capel St. Indeed, it had long since passed beyond the stage of being a practical proposition. It was that from the beginning. Then another order arrived from our Commandant, P. Holohan, ordering us to take over Hughes's Hotel in Lr. Gardiner St. At last we were on the move and took over those premises, which consisted of two houses, put them in a state of defence, then extended our operations by tunnelling through the adjoining houses until we had taken possession of the line of buildings stretching from the corner of Derrille Place to the corner of Talbot St. During the progress of that work we had been reinforced by officers and men of two other units, E and I Coys of the 1st Battalion, as well as a few odd men from different Companies, Capt. Jerry Golden, Lt. James Freeney, Lt. Con MacLoughlin of I Coy, and Capt. Paddy Gartland of E Coy.
Our garrison, in consequence, amounted to around seventy men, of which number C Coy supplied about forty men including:

Con Allen
Patrick Byrne (N.C.O.)
Fred Brooks
Andy Birmingham
Joe Crowe
John Cahill
John Corcoran
Wm. Curry
Frank Carberry
Michael Diggin
Patrick D'Arcy
Frank Foley
Patrick Flynn
John Farrell

Martin Finn
Felix Gallagher
(alias Peadar Meehan)
Michael Howlett
Denis Holmes (1st Lt.)
Tim Hanafin
Tom Hahesy
James Kinsella
Ned Keane
Patrick Kirk (2nd Lt.)
Bernard Lynch
Patrick Macken
Charles Myles
William Maher (N.C.O.)
Seamus McGuinness
Joe McDonough
Jim McArdle
Patrick Nevin
John Nalty
Patrick O'Shea
Seán Prendergast (O/C)
John Richmond (Adjt.)
Desmond Walsh
Thomas Kiernan

Other members of "C" were operating elsewhere:

Joe Cooling in Moran's
John Mulligan in Barry's
Wm. Bannon in Four Courts
Wm. Gannon in Four Courts
Patrick O'Connor in Gresham
Denis O'Sullivan in 44 Parnell Sq.
James Donnelly in 44 Parnell Sq.
James Downey in 44 Parnell Sq.
Con Mulligan in Four Courts
Seán Myler in Four Courts
Seán Morrissey in Barry's
Edward McArdle in Barry's
P.J. Walsh in Barry's

Additions to the garrison of Hughes's Hotel were:

Seamus McArdle (jun.)
.... Walsh (brother of Desmond)
Joseph Healy
Tom O'Neill of Fianna
Jerry Monahan (Fianna)
Wm. MacArt (Fianna)

and a Belfast refugee whose name I disremember.

Among the cailíní who looked after the cooking were Miss Marcella Crimmins, Annie Tobin, Annie Norgrove and Kathleen Macken.

Obviously we were still further removed from our 1st Battalion headquarters. Why should this be so with us? However, we could not choose our ground; it had been selected and we had no option but to comply and make the best use we could of a position that put us at such a great disadvantage. Our main concern was to maintain communication with our Battalion H.Q., and we had to plan on the assumption that fighting would extend to our small area.

Everything requisite for our welfare was seen to, such as the commandeering of supplies, arranging guards, sniping posts, cooking, first-aid posts, sleeping quarters, securing of an ample supply of water, and everything considered to be of use in case of a prolonged fight or a siege. Our weakness, however, was in arms, which even the augmenting of our force did not appreciably dispel. Had we rifles for all our men, proper serviceable rifles, more than half of our troubles would have been solved. After repeated appeals to the Battalion for a supply of rifles, we secured the modest number of five which, we were informed, were all that could be spared, when fifty would not have been in excess of our requirements. What a mercy, indeed, that we were not at that stage confronted with any great task in which arms, the weight of materials, would be the predominant and deciding factor. Then we should have made an indifferent show, though we might have made a gallant one with our dubious array of quasi and pre-historic weapons to back up our too few Lee Enfields, Metfords, Howths, carbines, not forgetting to mention the inevitable shotguns and miniature rifles that possessed

minor qualities in a major warfare, and all the while the men showed gameness for anything. Not one word of complaint, not a murmur of despair or sign of despondency was expressed or implied. Any commander would have been proud of them, could feel a certain confidence in possessing their moral and physical support under the circumstances in which they found themselves. Were they reliable? Could they be depended upon in a time of crisis? These questions I had asked myself many, many, times during the past week - perhaps the past months. Such questions had been debated by my junior officers and N.C.O.s. We did not, of course, envisage a situation like this one. Some of us did not think it would come to such a point, when former comrades would be classed as enemies and fight as enemies. Had we not, by the process of soundings, suggestions and innuendos, tried to find out what our men were thinking of, what their opinions were on the issue that so much assailed us. How would they act at a critical moment, supposing a critical moment arrived, when we would be put to the crucial test, when it would be a question of going the "whole hog" in defence of our principles and our cause.

Not that we could be regarded as mercenary or deeply anxious to engage in a "blood bath", though some people were possitive on the point that it would invariably come to that, and that it was impossible to escape it. Events had proven them right. We officers had sufficient knowledge to realise that some of them subscribed to the belief in the probability of resort to arms. They could, and did, argue the question 'inside out'. But not all the men viewed it

in that light. Some moderated their opinions that it couldn't go that far. Yet, come what might, they were in it to the end. There was no incongruity, however, in us getting to know the temper, the feelings, and the opinions of those with whom our lot was cast, in the assumption that if hard days came our way there would be proper understanding of the amount of assistance that would be forthcoming, if and when needed. Much of that had already been satisfactorily settled before the actual initiation of hostilities. The final answer to the riddle whether, or if, our men would take up arms in such a contingency as this was already answered. The fact that so many officers, N.C.O.s and men of our "C" Coy were on active service was striking proof of their reliability, their soundness and their loyalty.

By striking against the Four Courts garrison the Treaty forces struck against us. We on our part participated because their action represented to us a major assault on not a mere post or position, but because it threatened, as it was aimed, to destroy the existence, the stability of our force - the I.R.A. Words, shibboleths and promises were thrown to the wind - no longer was it possible for Treaty-ites to declare that "we're better I.R.A. men than the next". The crisis, since it had to come at all, bore the trace of having being provoked by the British on the same principle as the innumerable crises in which they were involved in the past "to bring good order and staple government" to a distracted and disturbed Ireland. Perhaps it had to come that way. Who knew? Certainly not us, the little cogs in the political

machine. We did not even know if it meant a general upheaval, or whether it would be only a local or localised fight to get "the I.R.A. crowd out of the Courts". One could not then judge the course the fight would take. But one thing was secured, Dublin; the Dublin Brigade of the I.R.A. were out - Dublin is again echoing and re-echoing to the sounds of gun fire - and it looked as if the Rising of Easter Week 1916 was being re-enacted, with the difference that then the combatants were foreign as against native, instead of as in 1922 they were both of native stock. Ironically enough, for the second time in our generation the Four Courts was held by men who declared themselves to be members of the Army of the Republic, fighting for the declared Republic in 1916 and for the established Republic in 1922. No less ironical, too, we had in our Company garrison a score or so men who had served in 1916.

Ours were a composite force, the duties connected therewith being carried out co-jointly, the various officers, N.C.O.s and men being assigned certain defined dispositions and positions in all affairs appertaining to the defence of the whole. Though Commander of the garrison, I had to share, or permit officers of equal rank to share in responsibility in most of the duties in which all were, in some way or other, involved, and in fairness to all, it must be said that there was never any occasion for splitting hairs over the questions of command. As it was, there were too many officers for such a small garrison, three skeleton Companies, our own "C" Coy forming more than twice the amount of the other two combined. Yet, all played their part dutifully,

nobly and loyally, having one thing in common - to work with, and on behalf of, the men, of whom it could be in truth declared, that they did not need much handling, so agreeable, so disciplined and orderly were they, causing us officers no trouble whatever. They responded in the highest spirit to every demand made on them, regardless of their own comfort or their own well being. Likewise, they meant it to be known that they were wholeheartedly in that thing, and they had no other desire than to see it through. One thing was never absent, their deep sense of humour. Perhaps the greatest example of that was to be found at one of the sniping posts. There fun was made over everything - the Staters shots that played havoc with the lovely patterned wallpapered walls, bespattered with bullet holes or grazed by ricochetted bullets, caused no little fun and banter to the men there. "Oh Larry, mind you don"t get your lovely head of hair tossed. See how near that shot came to you", and the quick retort "mind your tummy Jimmy, it"s in line with the loop-hole. Lucky the last shot didn"t come in". Humour, too, concerning our make-believe defence was manifest in the many little tricks and deceptions which sheer necessity forced us to bring into prominence to impress the "other side" that our positions were well fortified. Placing miscellaneous, and some of them nondescript, weapons protruding from windows, or through loop-holes, caused no end of laughter and banter for some of the men. Another matter that had a ring of humour attached to it was an incident that occurred one night when a few of our men were having the time of their lives. Lusty, merry, and not over-melodious singing was heard. We wondered where the

sounds came from, hardly believing that they emanated from any of our men or our possessions. One of the officers sought the object for that revelry, when, lo and behold, he discovered a few of our men much the worse "for the spirits". It appeared that they had come across a "drop of the craythur". They were, however, just merry and not over tipsy. By misadventure they had come across the stuff. Their discovery directly caused them to be transferred to less tempting quarters, the remaining spirits (and not the men) being placed under lock and key. It must be stated here that every effort was made to respect the property under our care, and no wilful or wanton damage was inflicted on furniture or effects, which were generally undisturbed except such as were used for barricading windows or doors.

We were not long in our position when we discovered that another unit of I.R.A. was in occupation of houses on the far side of Gardiner St. These stretched from Moran's Hotel at the corner of Talbot Street and five or six other adjacent houses. The Pawn Office at the corner of Waterford St. was also similarly occupied. In contacting them, we discovered that they were mainly composed of the 5th Battalion (Engineers), under Commandant Liam O'Doherty. Later we learned that they, too, were a mixed body consisting of men of various Battalions. That group had placed a land-mine in the roadway outside Moran's in Talbot St., another on our flank at Derrille Place. Naturally, we had the greatest respect for, and adversion to, such formidable weapons of destruction. We disdained even to play

any fun tricks on them. Their presence was enough for us. Somehow they gave us an uncanny feeling. We wished them to be miles away from us - in case of accident - rather than being as close to us and our position. Pity the houses, not to mention the inhabitants, ourselves included, if those infernal things exploded! Some might regard them as an aggressive and dangerous toy, and we did not wish any foul play to be indulged in at their expense or for our embarrassment. Few of our men looked upon them in any other sense than that of wonder and anxiety, especially the men at the corner house in Talbot St. who were in visible proximity to "the thing". Everytime a Stater's armoured car passed along or near that point, the men expected it to "go off", but, as generally happened, the aforesaid cars never seemed to reach the danger zone for it to be put into action. Manoeuvrings like that intrigued our men, who gradually worked themselves into a frenzy hoping that the next time the mine will blow the car to blazes.

Our garrison had many other duties to pre-occupy them, the sending out of parties to raid and reconnoitre, dispatch work, the detailing of parties to seize other buildings in the neighbourhood, to occupy them for a time and then withdraw, while all the time we were digging our way from one building to another, thus extending our lines along Talbot St., intending to make closer contact with the garrisons in O'Connell St. The Treaty forces were, we learned, in occupation of Amiens St. station, several hundred yards away. They used the clock tower as a sniping post to command Talbot St. That position was well

within range and field of fire from one of our sniping posts, the corner of Talbot St., as well as by some of the men at Moran's Hotel. Then again some of the buildings occupied by our men came under machine gun fire from passing armoured cars. Every other vantage point in our defensive zone was well manned, special care and attention being taken to afford sufficient protection on entrances and ground floors in case of assault. Special men were placed at likely vulnerable points to deal with infantry or armoured car activity.

The fact that we were adjacent to the Moran garrison produced a certain feeling of confidence. We knew that in any attack made by the Treaty forces each could play a part in support of the others. In one way or other it seemed a pity that we were both condensed in such a short space. That was, perhaps, a perplexing point, but not less so than that which related to our status as a unit in the administrative and operational sphere in relation to Moran's garrison being under the authority of a Commandant. We were not aware of any hard and fast rules on the matter, but it did seem a bit contradictory to have independent authorities exercised by both a Commandant controlling one garrison and a Captain a neighbouring one. Some form of co-operation was necessary. Hence I contacted Comdt. O'Doherty, explained our situation and that we were acting under orders of our Battalion Commandant, P. Holohan. It was obvious that Comdt. O'Doherty was equally perplexed, thought the situation peculiar, but it must be said to his credit that he did not seek to impose any undue influence in

regard to our operations or our status.

While these matters were under way we received from our Commandant an order to take over the distillery at Brunswick St. Could this mean Nth. Brunswick St. or relate to Brunswick St. (now Pearse St. on the south side of the city? Neither seemed very alluring from the point of view of distance, not to mention the possible hazards in trying to get through. But of the two propositions, the former had something in its favour in that it would bring us within our own Battalion area though still leave us further than we were now from our Battalion Headquarters. To move to Brunswick St. (now Pearse St.) - well, that was hardly intended as a strategical or operational move. Still the question puzzled us, and puzzled we were at the not very rosy prospect in moving our men and materials east to west to Nth. Brunswick St., to cover a distance of about two miles and get away with it. Surely that was the last straw, when we knew, from information obtained, that very few approaches were open to permit of easy passage, and no matter which way we moved the line of route was well dotted with buildings, barracks etc. occupied by Treaty forces. After consulting the other garrison officers and giving careful consideration to every aspect of the matter, decision was reached that we would not take responsibility for such a gamble in an enterprise that did not seem to have the remotest chance of being successful. Our decision was mainly governed by our absolute weakness in material, not human weakness, and because we realised that that weakness, though very pronounced from the beginning of that

affair and in our then static defensive position, would in a greater degree be manifest were we called upon to engage in open street fighting unless under conditions in which our adversaries were similarly equipped, which we knew the Treaty forces were not.

Certainly it looked as if we were being set some very peculiar problems. Unfortunately they had a ring of peculiarity about them that one would not associate with playing according to the rules of the game. Problems that do not lend themselves to easy solution are always perplexing and puzzling. Even liable to be repeated. So were ours when came and Thursday/another order arrived from Commandant Holohan instructing us to move to Scott's in Upper O'Connell St. Such a move would bring us nearer our Battalion Headquarters and in our Battalion area. We accordingly welcomed that order for those reasons alone. We made our plans to evacuate our position, meanwhile contacting Commandant O'Doherty in the post opposite and acquainting him of the fact. He was none too pleased about us leaving the area and expressed himself in strong terms against such a course, as by so doing his command and his position would be appreciably weakened. To make matters worse, he declared, "If you (meaning the garrison) go, we move also". I took that in its literal sense - it seemed to me and to the other officers of our garrison, to whom I later communicated the gist of the conversation, a threat. There were sound reasons for him adopting that attitude because he had not enough men and materials to occupy both garrison posts, which was vitally necessary if we

moved. I appreciated his difficulties as being somewhat akin to our own. Here was another one of the peculiar problems already referred to. What was to be done under the circumstances? Naturally our only course was to obey our Commandant's orders. This time we could not dally as we knew that our forces in O'Connell St. were being severely tested. Accordingly, it was agreed that Captain Garland with his group would proceed to the new post. We arrived then as best we could and they left. Again the hubbub from Moran's garrison. This was getting more confounded, and all the while the threat "we will go also". Eventually, to meet the situation, I dispatched two of the girls who were assisting in cooking, Marcella Crimmins and Nan Tobin, to go with a report to Brigadier Traynor in the Hammam Hotel Headquarters explaining the dilemna in which we were placed as a result of the exercise of dual authority. "Whom were we to obey"?, our own Commandant's orders or the desires of Commandant O'Doherty. The answer was simple and terse, "place yourselves under orders of Commandant O'Doherty". Immediately Commandant Holohan was informed of the Brigadier's order, the same girls bringing the dispatch. Of these girls it must be said, they acted very bravely. Their task was no easy and no light one, considering that in that dangerous mission they had to traverse streets and localities during sniping and when fighting was in progress, always at the peril of their lives. We could not have employed any of our men on that work because they were generally too well known and, besides, we could ill afford to spare them from their other duties as at that time we

needed them in case of action by the Treaty forces against our positions. The girls had many stirring stories to relate of clashes in Dominick St., Parnell St. and O'Connell St., the latter area being particularly lively, and as they had to make detours to carry out their tasks they were thus enabled to obtain information of the trend of the fighting away from our constricted source of activity. Later they were sent for a short while to cook for one of the outposts of the Moran Garrison situated at the Pawnbroker's in Gardiner St., returning to our position to resume similar duties with other girls - Annie Norgrove and another girl named Madden.

The matter of our status decided in that way left us perhaps in a little better position than heretofore as far as war materials were concerned, for in giving part compliance to our Commandant's order we had suffered the diminution in men and materials, the latter being at the time of very serious importance. In trying to make do, we had to have recourse to the strictest economy in the use of ammunition, of which quite a considerable amount had already been expended by our snipers. Naturally we had to plan on the assumption that bigger demands would be made on us by way of attack or a siege, either of which were considered to be a not far distant possibility judging by the increasing gun-play and gun fire that was going on in our immediate vicinity. Of the many reports that were in circulation around that time, that which had reference to the Treaty forces having taken over Talbot House was the most potent and serious. That

place, if occupied, was a point about midway between our post and the garrison in O'Connell St. If that report was true, then we would be in for a breezy time, assuming that they also occupied the Marlboro St. School buildings, portion of which reached to the rear of the houses occupied by us. Had we men and guns available, those buildings would have been in our possession from the beginning. Under the circumstances we had to accept the situation to our dire disadvantage.

Time had become of little concern to us. What with broken and insufficient sleep and the continuous din of shooting that went on day and night, we were ever on tip-toe awaiting the big onslaught to be made against our positions. Sometimes the shooting occurred within our immediate neighbourhood, by means of fusilades from armoured cars passing by, or rifle connading between our and the Treaty forces snipers, mingling or alternating with the sounds of potential pitched battles in the vicinity of O'Connell St. We knew not what was happening at the Four Courts, especially since the cessation of artillery fire which had been continuous for some days until the Friday when we heard the garrison had capitulated. It looked then as if sooner or later our time would come when assault would be made on our and Moran's Hotel garrison. How should we stand up to it? We knew not the answer to the question or even conjecture, although we knew enough that if artillery, or even a fair size machine gun or rifle bombardment was carried out, our chances of remaining in the fight would indeed be quite slender. But the question uppermost in the minds of the officers

was:: How long will we be able to hold out?

We did not possess any fulsome information on the general plan of campaign - little beyond the fact that we were placed there to occupy and defend the allotted premises. Our role, if we were to take our orders literally, was purely defensive. In thinking in these purely military terms, we were not so foolish as to imagine that our defence, or the extent of the resistance that we could put up, would be of a prolonged or even satisfactory nature. It would be foolhardy to expect that we would last as much as one day's sustained bombardment should the Treaty forces bring into play sufficiently large forces and equivalent material, which they so lavishly possessed, against us. We had enough military sense to realise that if they were truly cognizant of our many weaknesses, as already numerated, they would have come to close quarters with us sooner. Who could blame us for adapting ourselves to that defensive role; necessity and circumstance were as much responsible for that as were we. Other posts may have been differently, and possibly better circumstanced and more favourably placed than ours. Lucky for them if they were, but as far as one could judge the position the fall of the Four Courts presaged that stone and mortar were not invulnerable to attack then any more than they were in 1916.

From early Saturday morning the much expected attack started to break out. We had little sleep the previous night by reason of our expectancy

than an assault would be made on us during darkness or at dawn. Several times during the night the gun fire had reached high pitch and we were glued to our several positions. Not by the employment of huge forces, nor by any brilliant strategem or strategy, did it come to us, but by means of sniping of greater volume and intensity than before employed. Moran"s garrison, too, was receiving its share of attention, such parts of their posts as were exposed to view and range of the Treaty forces at Amiens St., while Treaty armoured cars careering around sent more than token bursts of machine gun fire through windows etc. These cars, be it noted, played fun-tricks when in the vicinity of the mine in Talbot St., enough to keep the men charged with the task of exploding it on edges. Then suddenly one loud explosion is heard as the mine explodes, tumbling down a lot of our barricades at doors and windows and causing the buildings to quiver and shake. So violent was its impact that several of us were knocked to the ground. That was my fate. Confound the mine anyway! What a mess it left our position in. With our defences broken down and strewn about the rooms and in the hallways, our positions presented anything but a fortress then. It took time, patience and ingenuity in getting these places into some kind of protective shape again.

All through that night we were made visibly aware that the climax was in sight due to certain symptoms and alarms, not to mention the movements and activities of the Treaty forces. On the following morning, Sunday, 2nd July, the attack was

launched. It came, however, in quite an unexpected way. Below our positions and further to the end of Gardiner St. was an overhead railway (the "loop line") which connected Amiens St. to Tara St. railway stations. Intense outbursts of fire was directed from that point against our positions and along the street, the corner house at Talbot St. corner being particularly subject to frontal attack. At first it was not known from whence the bombardment came. The Treaty forces had brought up an armoured railway engine on which they had erected a trench mortar to pound at our positions. That engine and the railway itself afforded them very good cover, as well as the fact that they held undisputed use of the railway system. In addition, they had the protection of the gable ends of houses which met the bridge at that point. Our men were not so well fitted to counter that move - the only effective fire they could deliver was through a few loopholes made in the walls of the corner house where only a few men could operate at a given time. These men had narrow escapes when the missiles exploded about them, tearing holes in the wall. They could not be expected to perform wonders in the face of the form and the severity of the attack launched against their position. In great extremity they were forced to abandon their positions and to fall back to other positions, having to vacate what, up to then, had been our main offensive and defensive flank position.

While this was going on against our positions the men at Moran's were getting their share of attention from the Treaty forces. It looked as if

the whole neighbourhood was affected by the continuous harassing fire. Most of the advantages were credited to the Treaty forces, armaments, manoeuvrability and, to some extent, dispositions favoured them. There came a point when communication with Moran"s garrison failed, to be renewed during an occasional lull in the fighting. Yet we held on grimly against the odds that were against us. Succour, we had little, nor support, nor help except such as was provided by Moran"s garrison, then fighting a partially isolated fight like us and in a somewhat like situation. We had to battle in whatever fashion we could and however we were capable. All the while the dread thought that we would be overpowered and beaten was before us, even though we were consumed by the feeling of making the best defence we could in order to make the task of conquest a costly one for our attackers, then showing their teeth so angrily ground and set to devour us by what seemed a process of attrition rather then by full blooded quick, decisive effort on their part. But alas, feelings and desires do not always predominate a battle or win a contest. Certainly not the one we were then waging, as we had reason to appreciate.

At what appeared to be a critical stage in the fighting we had the uncanny consciousness of being isolated. By all outward appearances there was little movement in the houses opposite our positions. Were we on our own then? That gave rise to a consultation between the officers of our garrison. What shall we do next? We check up on our position. Can we hold out, and if so, for how long? As things stood then we were at a decided disadvantage

in practically every way, the only thing in our favour being that while we held on, the Treaty forces might be delayed in making a grand assault on the garrison occupying portion of O'Connell St. We must delay them as long as possible as a matter of principle.

During all that time our men behaved wonderfully cool, collected and determined, showing neither sign of hysteria or fuss, all under perfect control. The human factor, it could be seen, stood up to the strain imposed by the ordeal. Yet alas, it was only of secondary importance to that of armaments in deciding the issue of the fight. We had no means of checking the pace which the Treaty forces imposed, for already most of our men had nothing better than small arms to fight with. What was to be done under such adverse conditions? Nothing more and nothing less than that a small garrison would be retained to hold on, a decision come to by the officers in consultation. A small number of officers and men were detailed for the purpose, the remainder and larger number, were ordered to evacuate. Similarly arrangements were made to send away some revolvers and special material, and a place selected in which to deposit grenades and explosive material, if necessary. By that means a small garrison of less than twenty remained. We hoped the men who had been released would get through safely, although we had doubts that they would for it looked as if the whole area was held by our attackers. Then we heard that Moran's garrison were withdrawing, which news left us in a further quandary.

Chapter 28.

Meanwhile other things were happening within our garrison. We still further reduced the numbers of men on duty, at a time when there was hardly any other course open to us except to carry on a delaying action. During that phase one of our men received a gun shot accident when unloading a revolver in the kitchen. This, though sad and exciting, was hardly of much moment in comparison to the trend of events that were being shaped, in which "finis" was being written to the chapter of our resistance to the Treaty forces. Having appreciably depleted our altogether meagre supply of ammunition, the garrison, twelve of us, consisting of Captain Jerry Golden, Lieutenant Jimmy Freeney, Bertie Somerville, Larry O'Connor, Paul Brady and Paddy Mahon of "I" Coy, Lt. P. Kirk, Martin Finn, Tom Hahesy, Jimmy McArdle, James McGuinness and myself of "C" Coy, surrendered. Eventually we were marched out, paraded in the street, where to our chagrin and irony of ironies we were taken over by men of the Dublin Guards. Thence we were marched to Amiens St. railway station and taken over by Comdt. General Paddy/Daly as supreme officer in charge, who sought to make a speech in terms that we were his prisoners etc. etc. It was hardly likely that we were in the mood for that. Consequently, some of our men called on him to cut out the talk and get on with the work. We were afterwards brought along the platform and placed in one of the waiting rooms, ordinarily utilised for Dublin South Eastern Railway business, which place overlooked Amiens St. and

faced Buckingham St. Small mercies, indeed, if we had perforce to remain crouched there in a very small room.

Our stay there if unpleasant was not unexciting and strangely ludicrous. Not the least of these arose when one of the guards brought in a tray bearing refreshments "with the compliments of Commandant Daly". Hungrily we looked at the proferred fare, so very enticing, so apparently appetising. "Take it away" one of our men ordered. It was taken away, hesitantly it must be recorded, by the guard. Later, however, other refreshments were brought to us. This time the message ran, "Mr. Mullett sent these". We recognised the Mr. Mullett as the publican who carried on business in Talbot St. His shop was merely a stone's throw from our enforced "lay-out". These refreshments, known as stout, nourished barely half of our men, the rest being teetotallers and mere witnesses of the high jinks which the "brew" seemed to loosen, in a mild form, throats that by then were parched enough. Soon gusty salvos of song reverberated our not over pleasant "abode", sending echoes beyond its portals to the more than harsh discordant accompaniment of the sentries "stop that singing. Stop it or I'll...." while during that overture shouting was being indulged in, not as it must be in truth recorded, but against some "irregular" sniper or other in the vicinity. If only Mr. Mullett could have just a slight inkling that his refreshments touched tender heart spots, what would he say? Strange how men could sing under such circumstances. But a good deal of it was done more in pique and in derision than for

any other reason. Hence a musical evening was conducted, each of the party having to contribute a quota of songs to make up an impromptu concert. To add to the revelry, Miss Nellie sent in a quantity of cigarettes from her shop in Talbot St. addressed to Jerry Golden.

But we were not destined to remain there for long, and two days later we were informed that we were being shifted. Where to? Placed in a lorry assembled in Amiens St., and well and heavily guarded by several lorry loads of Treaty forces with armoured cars, we duly arrived outside Mountjoy prison via North Circular Road. Quite a large number of people assembled there, among them some of the girls who had been with us in Hughes's - our cooks Nan Tobin, Marcella Crimmins and Annie Norgrove. Greetings and the passing over of a few souvenirs including officers' Sam Brown belts - mine to Nan Tobin, Lt. Kirk's to Annie Norgrove - and a few verbal messages for delivery to our respective relatives took place. After a good few minutes delay the news came "There is no room in there". No room for 14 (our number then as two other "dangerous men" had been deposited with us, Dinny Madden and a Mr. Kavanagh.

Consequently we were brought away from the place, for a "joy ride" as one of our guards termed it, by a circuitous route to, of all the surprising places, Portobello military barracks where we were placed in the gymnasium building. A few other prisoners were there when we arrived. More followed until the place had its full compliment. Some of these were well known figures, among them being

Bob Barton, one of the signatories who had signed the Treaty terms under duress and who since had renounced his complicity in the deal and had taken his stand with the Republican side in the fighting. Our stay there was not quite unpleasant until some of the party, over a dozen, including Barton, Joe McDonough, Noel Lemass and about 40 others made good their escape one night. Many others tried to escape that way only that the alarm was sounded and then excitement and pandemonium reigned supreme. Machine guns were trained on the gymnasium and kept up a continuous din for a lengthy period. Then officers and soldiers rushed into our quarters, jostled us, threatened us, searched the place and checked the roll. They looked mad and were none too gentle or gentlemanly in demeanour and general conduct. We would be punished for the action of those who had escaped; close confinement was one of the forms the punishment would take, another being that we would be escorted to and from the Quartermaster's stores when drawing rations. Alas, "Ginger" O'Connell and some of the other high-lights whom we knew in the past were conspicuously present, to bring us to the proper realisation that we were their prisoners.

A week or so afterwards we were again moved, this time to Kilmainham jail - Kilmainham of the many memories of other times, other people and other causes, famous and infamous, with its age-long association with Ireland's fight against alien law, and the more recent phase, the Black and Tan struggle and the 1916 executions. Kilmainham of

hallowed memories and of glorious sacrifice. While waiting outside something bordering on a sensational escape occurred as one of the prisoners leisurely stepped from one of the lorries and walked across the road, entering a shop at the far side. It was hard to imagine any prisoner so coolly and so casually making such an attempt at escape without interference from the Treaty forces who were there in such great numbers. That thrill was small compared to the one we received when we entered the jail and "presented" ourselves to our prospective jailers - Dan MacCarthy, Seán Ó Murthuile and a few other notabilities. Of the two, Dan was the least liked that day. Many bitter and uncomplimentary comments were expressed by some of the prisoners. How could one picture him as jailer - the Dan that we knew so well in the recent past as "Sinn Féin Director of Elections" and with whom, and under whom, many of us had served in a number of exciting election contests. Reflection on past days or past events had no other purpose than to exaggerate the apparently unrealistic natures of jailer and jailed, and of the two species we, as prisoners, had sound cause to appraise that in that "durance vile" ours was, perhaps, the lesser role, being "guests" of some slight value and importance.

So after we were duly recorded, not in letters of gold be it noted, we were ceremoniously, or otherwise, ushered into the interior darkness of the prison proper, having in the meantime being furnished with the various niceties of blankets and utensils and made aware of regulations governing

prisoners. The wing into which our party was deposited looked anything but inviting, much as it would have looked to a Parnell, a Pearse, or any other of the brave men or women whose lot was cast there. It was dark, dank, squalid, miserable to behold. It even smelt of these inside as it looked to be from the outside. It was the very personification of everything that was loathsome, hideous and foul. That was how it appeared to us at first sight on that July day - when outside the "sun was splitting the trees". The fact that it was on the "condemned" list and regarded as unhabitable did not enhance its reputation or its appearance. How true to say that it was typically prison-like, and on that account true to form and characteristic. That it was appalling, overcoming and crushing few, if any, of its inmates could otherwise testify. Fresh air was an unknown forbidden quantity. Even the sanitary arrangements were of a nature primitive and unsuitable, so much so that repairs had to be affected almost daily, giving a fair share of work to plumbers and inducing clashes between jailers and jailed.

One of the first reactions of the prisoners to the stuffy, unventilated atmosphere of their prison abode became manifest when cell windows were broken in order to permit the entry of fresh air and the emission of foul air. Some even went further and gave practical demonstrations of how big iron doors were torn down in Mountjoy and other places of recent date. Unfortunately, these otherwise utilitarian objects had many disadvantages. They

caused endless draughts and uncontrollably strong gusts of wind travelled through the building. Truly air-conditioning with a vengeance! Thereby we were afforded many opportunities to breathe God's pure air a la mode, at the risk of being caught in air pockets or in the many vacuums that were created at cell entrances. One had to be very wary indeed in negotiating the landings without losing one's equilibrium or one's breath.

The prisoners lot in that prison could not be regarded as being happy or pleasant. From the start the relations between the jailers and the jailed were of a strained and provoking nature. There the political issue was fought out, expressed and regaled to suit the occasion. Plainly the prisoners showed little love or regard for their jailers, and in similar vein those who "Ran the prison" did so on the grounds that everything in the garden was lovely, in other words the prisoners were inhabiting a veritable paradise. Co-operation was practised in a mild way. Each side kept the other at arms length. Sometimes relationship was only of a tolerable nature; one side - the prisoners - asking the least favours; the other side - the jailers offering little on the point that they were governed by prison regulations, prison codes and prison discipline. The main difficulty for exercising co-operation seemed to be centred partly around the prisoner system but chiefly against the prison personnel. These proved to be deterrent factors against the day to day normal co-operation that even under British regime was found to be necessary

where the interests of "political prisoners" was at stake. But in 1922 the I.R.A. prisoners disdained to have "any trucking with the Staters". Perhaps that was not the best attitude to adopt in such a situation. Yet it was an understandable one if viewed from the angle of continuing the fight even behind the prison bars, emphasised by the trend of the new order in which their and our loyalties were fashioned, controlled or enforced.

What a very strange and a most extraordinary phenomenon was the new order of things? The old order hath changed, departed, evacuated; the new one taking over, consolidating and maintaining all such landmarks and such institutions that formerly bore the title of being foreign or of foreigh delineation. Was it not a peculiar reversion on the part of those who, acting as jailers in their several capacities then, were once, if not often, before, jailed and in jail for no worse crime than the one alleged against us and no worse cause than the one we espoused - that of complete and sovereign Irish independence. Were we worse than they? If they on their part got satisfaction for the role they were playing in that episode, could we be blamed for deriving even a little meed of comfort in the thought that they, and not we, had changed with the times, and changing were on the wrong side of the bars.

Even in jail it is not perhaps always possible to apply non co-operation as a fixed principle or in its strictest sense. Many reasons could be advanced for and against such a policy, but generally

speaking some form of co-operation was essential if for no other reason than that of preserving our rights to be treated as prisoners of war or as political prisoners, not that the Staters treated us otherwise - rather to their credit they treated us in some such way - thus following in line with a right that had been secured under British rule. It followed then as a matter of importance, some might say expediency, that if the conditions as were then prevailing were to continue, some method of co-operation or liaison between prison authorities and prisoners would have to be secured. Many of our men were adverse to such an arrangement for many reasons, a particular one being that by so doing we, that is our spokesmen, "would be got at" and become the cat's paw of the other side. Eventually opposition to the course was toned down; the prisoners by open election selected a council of officers to control and administer prison affairs. Jerry Golden was selected first O/C of prisoners. Officers were also appointed to each of the landings. By that means the internal government of the prison devolved on the prisoners themselves, who, as a result were left free to carry out their own affairs without having them conducted by the prison staff or those working with them. Liaison, therefore, was established between the O/C prisoners and the prison governor.

Our numbers in the meantime had been increasing and soon the portion of the jail allotted to us was filled to capacity - to more than capacity. Various types and degrees formed the

prisoners" circle, among them some important notabilities in the Republican Army, the Dáil and the Republican cause: the O/C of the Dublin Brigade, Oscar Traynor, the intrepid Flying Column leader, Tom Barry of Cork, the former envoy of the Irish Republic in Paris and Rome, Seán T. O'Kelly, the former deputy of Dáil Éireann, Seán McEntee, and the Commandant of the 1st Dublin Battalion, Patrick Holohan. Other big fellows and small boys in the I.R.A. and Fianna were jumbled together, making a complete whole; characters like Tom O'Hanrahan, Emmet Humphries (nephew of the O'Rahilly who was killed in action in Easter Week 1916), Hugh and Jack Early, Martin Hogan, Seán Saunders, Gabriel O'Brien, Tim and Tom Rohan, Stephen O'Connor, Paddy Cahill, the brothers O'Carroll, Mick Dwyer, Paddy Morrissey, Andy Clerkin, Paddy Cahill, Seán Fagan, McSherry, the men of different Battalions of the Dublin Brigade, from the Black North (including the Derry Brigade), as well as I.R.A. men from the south, east and west of Ireland.

Each cell that normally was capable of holding one prisoner accommodated two then, and three men to each of the end rooms - termed store rooms. The latter contained fire places. The cells, of course, possessed no such luxury. Generally the prisoners' staff or landing leaders occupied these store rooms as they afforded space for carrying out the various types of work in which they were engaged. The amenities, a table and chairs, added to the comforts of the place. Many of the cells bore different titles, descriptive

of their garrison or associated with form of activity in which their inhabitants were recently engaged - "Hughes"s garrison", "Moran's garrison", "The Diggers" to mention but a few. Already some of the cells bore various marking and designations, names of I.R.A. men from 1916 onwards, mottos, inscriptions of great men and great events connected with the fight for freedom. Oh hallowed memories of the "six glorious years"! We were destined to link our names and our fortunes with those who had served Ireland previously in Kilmainham, a link that meant a continuation of a fight that was still being waged. Fate was kind to us in that we had not forsaken the past; our lot was shared with those who had borne privation, anxiety and sacrifice within these self same cells. Of such things, and because of them, we entered into spiritual communion with them. May be no less true, noble and self-sacrificing than they who paid the price of sacrifice facing firing squads, the hangman"s noose or the lonely prison cell,

"Far far apart, from each kindred heart
And death hangs, none can tell".

While, as already mentioned, Kilmainham jail then was not the happiest durance vile in Éireann, it was not always unpleasant or uninteresting. If anything, we were a happy-go-lucky community, generally fond of gaiety, revelry and, in some cases, an over-abundance of noise. These were translated into war-cries, musical and unmusical interludes, mild war-like fantasies to suit the moods, the fancies and the tempers of those who wished to have

a rollicking good time even though the heavens fell. Strange how some people could give bent to their feelings by creating a regular din, by giving full scope to their lungs and full play to utensils of the tin can variety, with the "musical" accompaniment of iron railings and bannisters so liberally placed around the landings, sometimes in such a lond strain and of such ferocious orchestration as to invite the presence of the jailer or his guards, and the showering threats to put a stop to the noise. Strange how sound travels in such a place; the gentlest patter of feet, the slightest movement and the tiniest breeze through the windows or along the passages echoed and re-echoed far and wide in the building. Especially was this noticeable in quiet moments such as during the night. Then it was ghastly, eeerie, uncanny. But in the daytime and before "lights out" in the night, normal life and ordinary movements could be classified as being one long drawn-out shuffling sound, rising and falling intermittently, yet never seeming to subside. But when a few of the "wild spirits" would play mad music with their improvised instruments, that ever and anon sent a dreadful pulsating disharmony through space, the high glass roof acting as a kind of acoustic apparatus to spread its violent sounds about, it became a thousand times worse and more deafening. These were, if anything, unmusical and tumultuous mad capers designed for fun and carried out for sheer downright merriment. How much more deafening, and easily more noisy, was the galaxy of bottle

orchestration and war-like pranks in imitation of machine gun and artillery fire which a few of the boys indulged in at odd moments to tease the guards, and, in so doing, brought the governor"s wrath on them for their devilment and unseemly conduct. The presence of the gaolers and the guards in this way only served to increase the fun for the revellers, who, satisfied with their orgy, desisted, only to start afresh on some other occasion. Then other ways were adopted to provoke maddening sounds and show off their latent "talent" to effect.

The younger spirits were hardly ever at ease, indeed could hardly be kept so when it was a question of putting in their time without having any other form of relaxation to occupy their time or attention. Theirs was not the task to sit numb and dumb within environments that had no earthly resemblance to a paradise. Consequently every known and every unknown device to engage in horse-play and frolics was availed of, from belabouring their fellow-spirits, all in sport and according to the game, to the carrying on of loud conversations or the emission of guffaws or cat-calls issued from one landing to another, or from the top to the bottom of the wing, deep enough and loud enough to be heard mayhaps in the Governor"s office some fair distance removed from the prisoners" quarters, if they were not heard beyond the jail. One of the greatest sources of annoyance to the jailers was the use the prisoners made of some of the windows to communicate to their relatives, sweethearts and friends outside. Such a system of spontaneous and uncensored communication was not

allowed by the reigning prison authorities, who, in exercise of their office and because of prison regulations, insisted and upheld that all forms of communication between the prisoners and the outside world and vice versa should go by ordinary prison chennels, undergoing a most meticulous and thorough censoring in the process. In accordance with the usual practice, prisoners were permitted to write and receive letters; it was the one and principal means of communication, all other modes being regarded as against "the regulations". But even in prison ways and means can be found to side-track the machination of the prison code. It is worthy of note that in Kilmainham jail at that period, secret communication channels were available whereby the spoken or written word infiltrated to the outer regions into the safe custody of many an anxious and destracted relative and friend. No need here to digress on the relative value and importance of the personal messages which an odd prisoner was able to pass out in that way. Our concern for the moment is to adumbrate on that other form of oral communication and inter-communication as carried on from the prison. At the time in question the windows on the east end of the prison gave a good view to the bridge at the upper end of Islandbridge. The distance dividing these points was roughly a hundred yards. All such communications had to be shouted aloud. Under such conditions they could not be regarded as secretive or personal. It so happened that almost at any part of the day some relative or friend

would congregate for the purpose of seeing their beloved ones speaking to them over the air. That system of communication embraced many topics, family affairs, political matters, love tokens and miscellaneous gossip and interchange of opinions. Sometimes it was availed of by some of the prisoners to propagate views on prison conditions, the way we were housed, treated or controlled. There were occasions, too, when advantage was taken to render a few bars of a song. Not infrequently a large audience would assemble at the bridge below, despite the many attempts of the State soldiers to disperse them. Shots were often fired at the prisoners thus engaged and at the people for assembling or engaging in that unlawful practice of communication with the prisoners. That form of communication was always a bone of contention between the gaolers and the prisoners.

Many prisoners risked their lives in persisting in the attempt, "even if only for spite" as some of them declared. Quite a good deal of it was conducted in order to make fun of the guards and to egg them on to shoot. Much of the conversations bordered on the ridiculous, savouring of jokes and fun than of any serious matter or interest. As often as not some of the guards were amused by the wise-cracks and jesting remarks hurled across space, and many a rousing cheer or jeer emanated from other prisoners inside when they were not annoyed by the manner and character of the running commentary indulged in by the communicant. How often indeed did individual prisoners poke fun at the expense of "the poor softee" for his

efforts in entertaining his listeners, even to the extent of making him look and feel and look ridiculous? Oftentimes the simplest conversation and the slightest remark was treated in friendly banter by the prisoners. Generally they went even further than that: sought to hold the prisoners' officers responsible for not maintaining proper order within the fold, in other words suggesting that the prisoners" leaders encouraged the proceedings when they did not exercise sufficient authority to stop them. The vocative exhibitions that found expression in broadcasting news across space were availed of by a minority of the prisoners, quite a number of whom did it for fun's sake or to put the "Staters on edges". Generally speaking, the bulk of the prisoners there remained very much in the background, and gave little countenance one way or other to such affairs, even refused to come to the windows when requested to do so in order to speak to their friends etc. outside. But the prison staff did not, perhaps, know these things. It would have been impolite and impolitic for any of the prisoners to mention them. Obviously these outbursts caused as much concern and uneasiness to them as to our own leaders. On many occasions it looked as if there would be a "show-down", that they would resort to force to prevent their re-occurrence. On many occasions the prisoners" spokesmen had to play diplomacy with the prison staff in order to mollify them, whose attitude in the matter was that "if the

prisoners could not be controlled from within, then we shall have to enforce discipline in our own way". As against that course, the prisoners' leaders always adverse to interference by the jailers in the internal arrangements as affecting our status as prisoners of war or political prisoners, prevailed on the men to desist. Meanwhile many things had occurred to blow gentle words of persuasion or entreaty sky high - when the prison authorities exercised their power to stop the practice by the use of sharp-shooters from the prison grounds to fire on any prisoner appearing at the cell windows. Many a pot shot was taken, and many a bullet found its billet in the cell or cells used for communicating or at prisoners who were seen looking out of the cell windows, while the guards inside made attempts to nip it from its source by making repeated raids on the offending cells or the issuing of commands to "stop that communicating". These efforts on their part aggravated a few of the bolder prisoners, who in turn, rather than be outdone in the matter, tried, in some cases by pretence and make-believe, to create the impression that they would not desist. Much of this was done in order to rile the guards and cause them to fire. It was fun to the "wild spirits" when bad shots were registered, or even when shots were fired at all. But, alas and alack, the time came when such action on the part of the guards resulted in several of our men being wounded. One of these was Paddy Hobbs, who, it appears, was in the immediate vicinity of the cell window when a shot entered, ricochetted, inflicting injuries on parts of his

body. Other men received minor injuries, scratches and grazings etc. from time to time.

A good deal of friction occurred between the prisoners and the prison staff over the food as supplied. Sometimes the food was rank, other times it was badly and improperly cooked. The result of this was that we never could be sure of a proper meal, the dinner especially being the main dish around which centred most of the clashes that occurred. Rejection of the proferred food frayed the not altogether sweet tempers of the prison staff, with drastic consequences for the prisoners who, in many such instances, had to do without or had to be satisfied with some make-shift alternative, often of the tin canned variety. Makeshift meals they were indeed, which even with food parcels we received from our familes or friends were inadequate to make up for the loss of wholesome, hot and well cooked meals. What a terrible waste of money, time and labour, and for which there could be no justification. The fact, too, that the food was declared fit for consumption and cooked by army personnel made the case more palpable, for the prisoners had no hand, act or part in its preparation or service generally, although some of our men were butchers, cooks etc. who could have performed the work had other arrangements been made to meet such a situation. Redress was not easily forthcoming from the prison officials, or some of them, on such an issue, as they most of the time looked upon our complaints as being prompted by the desire to black ball them and to make propaganda over our treatment.

It took more than a normal dose of persuasion to convince them that our complaints on the score were genuine, but not before ample proof was furnished and when, as a last resort, we refused to accept the food supplied unless it was passed by our prisoner comrade the butcher. Often in such contingencies food was rejected for being unsound, badly cooked or when it was served in dirty containers.

The "troubles" and "scenes" associated with such an unsatisfactory food service did not contribute to the establishment or maintenance of good relations and good manners between the prison officials and the prisoners. Not uncommonly the prisoners" spokesmen were hard put to it trying to convince them that our grievances were genuine. They, the prison staff, were sore because news of the bad food supply had been circulated outside - news that was smuggled out - our friends outside taking advantage of it "to show up" the bad administration of the prison. That "showing up" had been effected not alone on the food problem but on other matters as well - the inadequate and unhealthy sanitary conditions, the unsuitable hygiene arrangements whereby we were denied proper facilities to keep ourselves normally clean, the absence of baths or bathing emenities and, in general, the unclean and dilapidated nature of the prison. On top of these complaints was the fact that the place had been previously condemned by the British. Anyone of these complaints might have created a furore among decent people unless, like the prison officials,

they lulled themselves into the belief that they were put forward for propaganda purposes only. In connection with the reports then circulating outside it is well to mention that at the time the writer was the prisoners' spokesman, Sean McEntee, as adjutant prepared the documents by direction of the Council appointed by the prisoners. To our surprise, that document was publicised by our outside friends and, to our surprise,also, some amelioration in the conditions prevailing resulted when, eventually, a fairly good food service and facilities to bathe were secured. Other improvements were made to lessen the hardships under which we were jailed, but no amount of good wishes or pious intentions could supply a hundred per cent sanitary service unless it was totally scrapped and a new one installed. We were accordingly doomed to put up with it, such as it was, temporary repairs and all thrown in to the consequential inconveniences that accrued at regular or irregular intervals.

The liaison between the prison staff and the prisoners was seldom if ever of the best or of a satisfactory nature. The animosity engendered by the Treaty issue and the recent fighting, then regarded as the "civil war" hardly contributed to good fellowship or even good conduct on either side. None was asked for and none was given. There was always a feeling abroad which suggested that they were the victors and we the vanquished; they were right and we were wrong; they were benevolent and we truculent, unreasonable, spiteful. As we had no common ground except such as was endemic in the titles - jailed and jailers - our feelings were mutual and our purposes divided: two important attributes that went very far in regulating prison affairs to the inconvenience of the former and the convenience of the latter side. Every moment that passed increased the tension that existed, and encouraged the feeling, on the part of the prisoners, that their wishes and their demands for amelioration of their conditions or even the obtaining of necessary privileges (with all due respects to their status as prisoners

of war; for practically all the prisoners incarcerated there at the time had been caught in action or due to the part they had taken in the armed conflict then raging) and on the part of their jailers, or some of them, who kept rigidly to regulations, and showed little inclination to play game with us, to the point of making the jail a paradise when already we were getting the same food as their own men and they were doing their best for us, anyway. Not that all the prison staff always visibly acted such a part out of spleen or malice rather were they more prone to give us just as little as they could and nothing beyond what was prescribed.

Sometimes, however, individual members of the staff could be condescending in generosity of speech and in manner to individual members of the prisoners' staff. Not that the prisoners or their leaders sought to impress their jailers, or even that the prisoners selected their leaders for such reasons; rather such was never taken into account by them, good, bad or indifferent by way of making any appeal to the good graces or generosity of their jailers on their behalf. On the contrary, selection was made on the grounds of protecting the prisoners' interests and affairs. Why should they care about the feelings, the desires and the intentions of the prison staff towards them? Yet it did happen that, without inflicting any injury to the men, or the cause they had at heart, a certain man, or certain men representing them, might, as it were, touch tender hearts in and secure tender mercies from their opposite numbers, even on the doubtful score of being"good fellows", or deemed to be such in the other fellows eyes. It was incredible to think that such an accommodating spirit could exist in such a situation. In truth it never did to any appreciable extent. It might have been so under the British regime; it was hardly possible with their successors, for one solid reason that the prisoners forbade anything in the nature of absolute good fellowship or friendly approach or conduct towards the prison staff.

In connection with that matter it is pertinent to reflect that the prisoners were acutely sensitive to, and prone to be highly suspicious of any leader or spokesman who showed himself to be on intimate friendly terms with the Staters from the top down. "Keep them at arms length" seemed to be regarded as the best policy to adopt under the particular circumstances. Perhaps some of the prison personnel would, if they could, make conditions easier for us; some of them may have felt sorry for our plight then because of old times sake; perhaps they hoped that some measure of harmony should obtain between them and the prisoners and vice versa. Perhaps, on the other hand, they secured satisfaction in the fact that we were in safe keeping, and not capable of doing any great physical or material damage to their Treaty cause, and, being so safe, we would favour their friendship rather than their animosity and that the salutary experience of prison might bring us to a full assessment of the error of our ways and an understanding that the new political order had come to stay. Whatever the inclination, or the will on the part of individual officers of the prison staff, to perform singular acts of mercy or to show ordinary human kindness to the prisoners, the predominance of political animosity prevailed in the long run.to erect barriers sufficiently strong and formidable to prevent any real or satisfactory intercourse or mode of fraternisation whatever except such as related to interviews between the spokesmen appointed by the prisoners and the governor or his aide. The prisoners on their part thought that course the most ~~advisable~~ desirable and proper one, arguing that there was no point in showing a volte face there, in pretending to be conciliatory or appeasing when at heart they were not so.

Germane to the relations that existed between the prisoners and the prison staff and indeed between the prisoners and the armed guards, was the question of politics. On that issue the prisoners held the view that they were right and on the right side, although there was every indication that our

jailers would have us regard ourselves as being in the wrong in fighting on the wrong side and the role we were then, as prisoners, playing. They, our jailers, made every show that they were right, politically and in regard to their administration of the prison, with special emphasis on their political leanings and affiliations. Practically everything the prisoners did that fell short of admitting the political and prison status of their jailers was regarded as wrong and bore the stamp of being conducted for propaganda purposes, as if the prisoners or their leaders had no just cause for complaint in respect to their treatment and the things which under the regulations they knew to be their just rights or privileges whichever was the more applicable in their case. In generalising in this way, however, it must not be assumed that all the prison staff were unduly ungenerous, harsh or spiteful; there were individual cases where a friendly gesture, a kind word and a not overbearing attitude went a long way in toning down the temper of the prisoners who, out of common human kindness, reciprocated and paid full respect to such as behaved in that way. Unfortunately, the number of officers or guards (our jailers) who showed no considerations in that, or in any other respects were few and far between. We had perforce to plough the stormy sea of prison life with the mariner's luck supported by a faithful crew, depending on our united efforts and sustained by the thought that all is not lost yet.

Invariably Kilmainham Prison at that time could boast of a mixum gatherum of prisoners. All types were represented there. Could we but record the history of each individual Volunteer what would it unfold? Men who had served in Easter Week, men who had suffered previous terms of imprisonment and internment, men who had engaged in flying columns etc. and men who had in one form or other kept the flag of Ireland flying when danger lurked the land. What about Tom Barry - the great, perhaps the greatest flying column leader? His magnificent and daring exploits in the southern counties, hitting bitter and

and vital blows against a foe that was numerically and materially more than a match for him and his small detachments. By all tokens he was the hero of many a hard fought and successful ambush; his masterly leadership and superb courage appraised by gallant guerillas in the fight against British soldiery and Black and Tans. Could one think of any of those extraordinary and soul-stirring events without a Tom Barry? No, because his name was inseparably linked with deeds of valour, of renown and of glory that were neither second-rate nor unimportant in the military history of the time.

Take another case: Jerry Golden, a not very spectacular type, perhaps, but nonetheless a typical and pertinent one. Ever heard of Ashbourne and the little band of Volunteers that were out with Thomas Ashe in the memorable Easter Week? Jerry had been in the Bearna Baoighal at Cabra Bridge in the early part of the Rising and, when eventually it had to be abandoned the garrison there withdrew, and he made his way to link up with Ashe's men of the Fingal Brigade. Their exploits are part of the history of that eventful period. As a result of their actions then many of that garrison, including their commandant, Thomas Ashe, received various terms of imprisonment, some of them commuted death sentences. Jerry Golden found himself undergoing his "term" in several English prisons. Released in June 1919, he was later given charge of the training of cyclists in the 1st Battalion. In 1921 he became captain of "I" (Cyclists') Coy. A short time afterwards he was again arrested and released at the General Amnesty in December 1921, and here he was again for the third time "doing time".

Another figure, Oscar Traynor, served Ireland in the historic Rising of Easter 1916 as an officer in E/Coy. the 2nd Battalion, Dublin Brigade, Irish Volunteers. Interned at Frongoch, he was released at the General Amnesty in Dec. 1916.

When Dick McKee became O/C. of the Dublin Brigade, Oscar was appointed commandant of the 2nd Battalion, a position which he held until November 1920, when, after the slaying of McKee, he became Brigadier in charge of the Dublin Brigade I.R.A. Under his authority the plans for the initiation and a good share of the activities of the active service unit could be traced. The first initial meeting of that body was addressed by Brigadier Traynor in January 1921. Ever hear of the burning of the Custom House in May 1921? Whether you did or not, Traynor's name was associated with the planning of that vast operation which successfully weakened British civil administration in Ireland and brought about a Truce between the British and the I.R.A. forces.

Ever hear of Sean McEntee, one of the gallant crew of Irish Volunteers from the "wee north" of Ireland who was a friend-associate of Pearse, and other chiefs of the period, who came out in Easter Week 1916 and operated around the Co. Louth. For his complicity in the exploits then he was sentenced to death, commuted to a term of imprisonment, part of which was spent in English prisons until the amnesty in June 1919, when he was liberated. Not only did he serve Ireland subsequently, but over a number of years has been elected representative in the constituent assembly, Dáil Éireann. In recent times he had been in charge of a party of men engaged in making a tunnel from a house convenient to Mountjoy Jail for the purpose of effecting the rescue of I.R.A. prisoners incarcerated there.

You would not, perhaps, have very much knowledge of the lesser fry, the common rank and file volunteer and the little Fianna boys who formed the main body of prisoners in Kilmainham then. To pick them at random. Take, for instance, Emmet Humphries, a nephew of the indomitable self-sacrificing O'Rahilly of Easter Week fame. There, yonder, is Jimmy McArdle, a 1916 veteran, a man not merely in years but in fact, who rendered service in the Four Courts under Captain Frank Fahy, Lieut.

Joseph McGuinness and Lieut. Peadar Clancy. He had served two periods of internment in Frongoch in 1916, and Ballykinlar from December 1920 to December 1921.

Look at the little Fianna Boys, Sean Saunders, Gabriel O'Brien, Stephen O'Connor, Tom and Tim Rohan, etc. These little fellows, if they were not regarded as great in the military achievements or glories of the past, had contributed a share in support of the I.R.A. fight against the British, thus showing a continuity of service in Ireland's cause. That list could be multiplied many times over. Such as it is, it conveys a representation of types and characters no less remarkable or insignificant than those who, during the previous six years, accepted imprisonment and internment for a good cause. Away with the cruel accusations of those who sought to stigmatize them as off-shoots, irregulars, bank-robbers, wreckers, pre-Truce Volunteers and "he'er-do-wells". In point of fact, many of the prisoners took no second place in respect to national service, record or fame to any on the Treaty side. They could have chosen and followed a different path by remaining aloof or by going over to the other side. Their choice brought no better reward than the prison existence of a dreary and dismal Kilmainham. So be it!

CHAPTER 29.

Was not fate cruel to us that while we were prisoners in Kilmainham very strange and extraordinary things had happened, or were happening, in the outside world, so near and yet so far away from us? Political events in which by a clever stratagem the Government of the Irish Free State functioned without a parliament, when some of the republicans who had been elected were too busy with affairs connected with military conflict or unwilling to subscribe to the taking of the oath of allegiance found themselves powerless to exert influence on a situation where the element of a coup d'état was proximately present

objectively the Free Staters appeared to have the first round of the game and, according to their own showing, were undisputed masters in control of political affairs and in military pursuits carrying on the war against republicans throughout the different parts of the country. Labour, as represented by the Labour group, could not be said to be in opposition to the new Parliament; they, like the rabid Treatyites, professed to work the Treaty, every clause ~~of-it~~. and principle of it. We had learned a lot of news, through the medium of new arrivals, to our fraternity community many of whom had been captured in action in different counties. We could not be expected to know everything, but we were told quite enough to convince us that the war was being continued in various ways by big operations or in small guerilla parties like as during the Black and Tan regime. The latter, apparently was then being resorted to by the I.R.A. as we were often made aware by the sounds of sniping and detonations which reached our ears from time to time.

All the while we were engrossed in our affairs as concerned our position as prisoners, some worrying on in a happy-go-lucky way and others trying to while away the time according to their moods or their desires. Study we could not, a reading was more a burden than a pleasure in such a bleak miserable hole. Hobbies were neither possible nor feasible under such circumstances. These were relegated to nothingness in comparison to the urge to make as light of our durance vile as circumstances permitted and by partaking of mild forms of recreation, exercise and amusements which were of a limited nature owing to the sparcity of sufficient space and scope to afford muscles and limbs full play. Indeed, space, like many other things, was on the ration list; the little that was available in the exercise yard particularly so. Important as these matters were, they could not be considered as of very deep concern to, at least, a few of the prisoners who, breeding an intense obsession of

dislike for the prison and all things and effects appertaining thereto planned to attempt escaping. Escapeitis spread through the jail at high fever pitch. Many efforts were made in that direction. One of these, originating in the alert mind of an individual prisoner - Paddy Grant - had a quite modest beginning and almost a successful termination. Seizing a favourable opportunity, he donned himself in dungarees and, pretending he was one of the workmen who were then engaged in the prison in repairing the sanitary system, he appeared at the door or gateway which served as the main entrance to the wing. Luck favoured him when the sentry there permitted him to pass through into the passage-way that brought him to the vital door that separated him from the world outside. How he must have relished the thought of shaking the prison dust from his feet in the sight of liberty's goal! Alas, there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip. The gateway to freedom and away barred his advance. He was detected and, grief in his heart, placed back in his former abode. Poor fellow, he deserved a better reward for his pains, so simple, so audacious and so nearly successful were they.

Another and a bolder and bigger attempt to escape deserves recording. Plans were prepared to get out a few of the leading lights among the prisoners. On a certain night, or a certain midnight, the movement began. It appears arrangements had been made with one or more of the guards who, incidentally, had been brought over for the purpose, for a safe escape. None but a ver few prisoners outside those who were on the list to escape were sufficiently in the know of the grand plans. When the appointed hour, zero hour, came dead silence reigned in the prison, most of the prisoners being in very deep slumber. The proverbial pin, h had it been dropped to the ground, could have been easily heard in the quietude and eerie stillness of that eventful occasion. Lo, the excitement and the pent-up feelings occasioned by the good prospects to effect escape, which were both electrifying

and intense. Preparatory plans had to be made in a noiseless, suppressed and restrained manner in order not to alarm the guards or to awaken curiosity among the vast bulk of the prisoners. It was a moment for quick decisive and definite action. Cautiously, quietly and noiselessly the would-be escapees moved one at a time from their cells in stockinged feet, along the landings and into the corridor which normally was controlled by prison guards. The several shimmering, hardly discernible sounds, the almost hush-hush of the proceedings - one could, as it were, hear the suppressed breathing, the very heartbeats of the principal cast as they scurried by - were both uncanny and mysterious. Suspense, anticipation and optimism heightened as the seconds and the minutes sped. And then when we, of those of us who had an inkling of the proceedings, thought that the men should be down in the yard on what was the last stage of their journey to liberty, a shot rang out that sent a quivering shock through us watchers making us wonder, in bated breath and anxious intent, whether the plan had succeeded or otherwise. Could anything have gone wrong at the last moment and most vital point of the attempted escape? The answer came to us soon after when the sounds of scampering, hustling and hasty movements broke the former stillness of the prison indicating that the plan had miscarried. As if by magic, animation and excitement had come to the prison. One was made aware of this when other movements, the presence of a horde of State soldiers, prison officials and officers rushed in, searching the cells, counting the prisoners, etc. Strange to relate, all the prisoners were in bed, even those who a few moments before had tried to escape. What a marvel indeed that those men could have returned to bed so quickly, although some were found in cells different than their allotted ones. We did not, however, know whether the prison staff suspected that an escape had been attempted. It transpired afterwards that they had some knowledge of it, owing to one of the guards, the accomplice in the transaction having "split the gaff" or being found out. However, it happened

the story went the rounds that he received punishment for his deeds of commission and omission. It was said, too, at the time that a change of sentry in one of the "crow's nests" which were placed overlooking the walls of the prison and in commanding view of the exercise yard, which the escapees were using or were to use on their route to escape, helped immeasurably in frustrating the daring plan. So ended what might have been a most brilliant and highly sensational escape bid; so ended the possibility of getting such valuable men as Oscar Traynor, Tom Barry and others safely away, to link up with the fighting men outside.

The failure of that attempt to escape was enough to damp the ardour and kill the hopes of the most audacious jail-breaker. Indeed it did look as if that attempt, the cause of its failure being directly attributable to a weak link, dependance on the support of any of the guards, brought men to the realisation of the futility of trying to get free in that manner. But, no; that failure, if it meant anything, became as a leverage to the fashioning of other plans of a type in which full responsibility was to be shared by the prisoners themselves. But the point was how and by what means could such be carried out. The answer came in a rather peculiar and apparently ludicrous way. And this is the story. Many brains got to work, many plans proposed and many suggestions made. The outcome of which caused a start to be made on a new method to escape. Perhaps it was a very simple plan - a foolish one some would say - but a much harder and stouter one this time. Make a hole in one of the outer walls of the prison! Such a fantastic notion, an absolutely crazy idea. Surely nobody in their proper senses would suggest such a downright mad and nonsensical thing: to dig a hole in the wall. Now the walls of any normal or abnormal prison are substantially well made, strong and solidly built. In Kilmainham the surrounding wall was formed of granite blocks, much of them of enormous size and possibly very weighty also.

It appeared to be of stout girth and dimensions and at least twenty feet high. An opening could certainly be made in it in time, provided enough men and suitable tools were available to do so. It could, in all probability, be done by means of explosives. We had only one of these - men. Then what? Said the proposer of the plan: 'Make a hole in the wall if you want to get out'. Very wise men, and those who were less wise, dubbed the proposal as ridiculous and ludicrous in turn. But even in prison there is always room for both types, whether in the form of things or of men, or because of environment, atmosphere and life generally. Everything or almost everything and everyone associated with prison code had some kind of resemblance to unreality or affinity to unreality. The prison staff and their retinue of military policemen, armed sentries and armed guards, censors and other greater or lower notabilities were positively unreal and unrealistic because they were but symbols of authority rather than the true representation of the humanity of man; and so engrossed were they in their prison sphere or avocation to secure complete obedience to prison regulation as to become egotistically all important, thereby eliminating the human element in those who came under their purview sway and control. No less unreal and pertaining to unreality were the prisoners who became mere cyphers in extremis of a system, and within a system, that was devised and perpetrated to bring them to their proper senses, presuming that they were endowed with such which, if they were, made the task of reform a quite burdensome one and still so very unrelated to the human factor as between man to man, where independance existed between the classes comprising the prison community, viz. the jailed and the jailers, it was of an order that was, in some degree at least, controlled by human feelings, or the power of the mind over matter. When a man enters a prison, or adversely, when a prison gets hold of a man, the human element or human factor co-mingles with the bricks and mortar, the iron bars and iron doors and, losing his

individuality, he is no longer regarded as normal - at least society, which is supposed to consist of fellow human beings considers the offender abnormal and consequently good game for extracting retribution for their misdeeds, crimes and misdemeanours. However that may have or may not have been essentially appropriate to our then predicament, knowing our status as prisoners of war or as political prisoners, the fact that we became mere cyphers in a prison system that imposed numbers for purposes of identification bore certain relationship to our unreal mode of existence and the unrealistic potentialities of human beings, contact with citizenship, or with society became temporarily or permanently severed. The good John Citizen of yesterday's outer-world ostracised the recalcitrant John Citizen of today's inside-the-prison world; good John Citizen who, in praise of his own superior worldly wisdom, superb honesty and exquisite right-eousness proclaims himself to be singularly human and humanised, unlike his fellow-man, bad John Citizen, who, even in a good cause, became a fit or unfit subject for prison routine or prison ordinances.

In the period under review, while it might be unwise and probably wrong to delineate between the various types of prisoners or to make assertions that there were different types in Kilmainham then, there could nevertheless be reason for stating that they conformed to the usual categories of Irish political prisoners. They were one in sentiment, in reasoning and in outlook, living under the one roof, and affecting to have the same things in common. It could be said that they were all of one mind in regard to the values they set on political and national matters, and the desire to serve at whatever cost, hardship or consequence the cause they served. There was only one point where divergence prevailed and that was on the question of escape or planning to escape. Which bring us to the continuation of the brain-wave which gave rise to the idea of "the hole in the wall", an idea and a proposition that sounded

as fantastic as knocking down the walls of Jericho with rhetoric abuse or scorn. Better dismiss the idea without further ado! That is what might have happened had not someone, possibly less mad than the proposer of the plan, become sufficiently interested to give the matter a trial. After all nothing could be very much lost by making the effort. On the contrary, if successful, it would show that "stones do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage".

In recording the story of "the hole in the wall" of Kilmainham prison, let us start from the end rather than the beginning of the plot or affair. It appears, actually it happened, that on an August day, morning or night, 1922, great excitement prevailed among a group of free State officers who were seen, from the prisoners' quarters, in the exercise yard examining the prisoners' handiwork. There before their gaze was the opening in the wall, in all its nakedness, and mystifying beyond description. The particular spot where the hole had been made was in a somewhat secluded spot, to wit, beside a row of lavatories. No need here to describe the scenes of consternation, bewilderment and excitement that spread inside the prisoners domain, or among the prisoners and the prison staff respectively. Suffice it to say that the place soon became a veritable bedlam as soldiers rushed in with rifles and fixed bayonets to take up positions at all vantage points, the prison staff and officers taking a complete survey and recording of the prisoners who, in the meantime, had been confined to their cells. When their inspection, searching and probing had finished, the inevitable punishment was meted out to us "letters and parcels were stopped".

Thus was the end of the effort to escape through the medium of making a hole in the wall! But the full story of intrigue, of labour, sweat and time spent in furtherance of what would have been probably the most remarkable achievement in jail breaking and clearance is both interesting and

romantic and comical. Each day for a couple of hours the prisoners were permitted the use of the exercise yard for recreational purpose. Every day a small number of men were to be seen loitering around the lavatories. Few observers would have been much impressed to take account of them, knowing that other groups of prisoners were also congregated in other parts of the yard playing games, tricking or joking together. Were one really observant or 'nosey', they could not fail to see that day in and day out a man then or a man again seemed to be engaged doing something like tapping and scraping at the wall and manipulating the masonry when it was freed from the joinings. No ponderous hammer or large tools were in use for the purpose. These "workmen", being merely guest prisoners, had to be contented with the simplest, the queerest and the tiniest implements possible or procurable. It was herculean tortuous work, a little bit every day, when one granite block responded to treatment and was accordingly loosened; another, and gradually several, until after many days spread over a peric of weeks, progress was reported. Every day, prior to the issuing of the signal "Exercise up" the stone or stones that had been removed were replaced, strange to relate, in the opening in neat "bricky" style. At every operation the loose stones had to be taken out so as to permit of fresh openings to be made through the wall. It was an intriguing and cunning enterprise, but no less intriguing and cunning were the exploits of another group of prisoners who daily engaged in a "water battle". That trick was part of the game to cover up the tracks of the wall digging, but principally the opening. The sentries and possibly some of the prisoners who were not "in the secret" must have thought the "water battle" nothing short of madness, especially the sight of seemingly intelligent and some of them knowingly fullgrown men handing water from tin cans etc. at each other.

Not always, however, was the water aimed to drench the opposing side in the battle. The main purpose was generally fulfilled when much of it was spilled in the vicinity of and on the wall where the hole was being made. No cleverer trick could have been devised. In that wise, the work progressed until shades of Hercules! one day the "diggers" or "borers" announced "We are at the last brick. I can see outside through a slight opening in the joints"!!! One more day's work and the laborious and arduous work would have been accomplished. Already they had made a hole five or six feet in depth, sufficient for most of our men to lie flat in. One more day - the last stone to be loosed, but not removed until the appointed moment for departure of the escapees. One more day, how incredible! The hour of deliverance for some - the mystifying question was how many? is in sight. Will it ever come?

Was it not a remarkable coincidence that the day selected for the break out should be that when Arthur Griffith, the head of the Free State Government, was to be buried - a day and a time when the prison authorities might be, in military parlance "off their guard", if not over-anxious to bother themselves about us. So it should have been or probably would have been, but for the fact that the hole in the wall was discovered in time when many a prisoner was feeling jubilant at the thought of being free again. That it was a tremendous effort to escape none could gainsay. Even our jailers marvelled at the ingenuity and dexterity displayed in performing such work under the very eyes of the guards, who could not be, in justice, regarded by us at least as being anything but attentive and vigilant. They must in their own particular way have sensed that had the escape been effective many a cell would have shown emptiness, and quite a number of the "important" ones among the prisoners would have added to the strength of the I.R.A. outside. For the plan, admitting to a fair measure of luck, could reasonably be capable of freeing at least a score of men, even more if the guards were sufficiently relaxing on such a day of mourning. As it was, the

gaolers, in consequence of having their lucky find, felt highly elated; the prisoners in an opposite aggrieved at the failure of the attempt to escape, and so ended what was not, after all, a ridiculous or ludicrous "hole in the wall" proposal.

That attempt cost us, all the prisoners without exception, a good deal of misery, and a more than fair share of hardship owing to the imposition of disciplinary action, confinement to the interior portion of the prison, more careful and painstaking vigilance on the part of the prison authorities, the curtailment of the privileges of receiving parcels sent in by our relatives and friends and the issuing and receipt of letters. We were cut off from intercourse with the outside world. These had to be borne, as well as the loss of smokes, until our jailers thought we were sufficiently punished when the reprisals were somewhat relaxed to permit us to carry on in some vext sort of abiding peace.

Were you ever a patient in a prison hospital? Probably not; but if you were, then the relevant question arises; did you like the experiences? Which brings us to the point whereby Kilmainham prison hospital at the period can be introduced. Behold a room, larger than an ordinary cell, in other words, roomy, situated on the ground floor, outside the pale known as a wing, where the other prisoners were "housed", and divided by a passage-way or corridor that serves as communication channel or connection to other parts of the

prisoner proper. Although that room was barely a few feet away from the wing entrance it was as perfectly isolated as if it were situated in a desert. Thus it was dark and no whit more airy or homelike than any of the other "apartments" on the prison ground floor; air and light being governed by the true - to - regulation prison window, measured in inches rather than feet, iron bars and tiny glass panes included. Even the three patients, lying in separate beds, beside each of which was placed a small table, did not suffice to lend any greater charm to a place that few people would term habitable or hospitable, either as a hospital or a hospital ward. Allowances should be made in that it was in its initial stages.

Truly the place was "no great catch" nor imposing nor elevating. It would be a miscalculation to infer that as yet it could be hardly intended to perform any extraordinary medical miracle. One would not make bold to offer insult to the medico because of certain drawbacks and weaknesses for which he could invariably not be regarded as solely responsible or even party to. The Prison M.O. Doctor McNabb was assisted by a soldier

acting as a medical orderly, excluding the inevitable sentry, whose business it was to keep a weather eye on us, poor unfortunate patients. Now, the orderly had come over from Scotland to join the National Army (the new application for the Treaty Force). Dr. McNabb was a dour, wee Northern, who for a number of years held fame as a Sinn Fein political figure. The presence of the good Doctor in the jail was seldom conducive to good relations between some of the prisoners and himself.

Many a scene could be traceable to the aversion or diversion on the part of the said prisoners or in relation to the doctor's hasty, aprupt or sometimes indiscreet mannerism or speech. There could be no doubt that from the beginning, a strong dislike was formed and expressed in many ways and on many occasions. Of course politics had a lot to do in affording a cause for the scenes in question.

So strong were the uncordial and uncivil relations that many a prisoner abstained from or refused, the aid and minstrations of the good Doctor for the reasons specified. In such

a dilemna medical service was surfeit, the prisoners no less than the M.O. suffering thereby. In such a situation the doctor worked at a disadvantage and he could not have failed to notice that at least some of the prisoners held him in disrespect because, to them, he was another Free State Officer. His ministrations to be effective and useful depended on the willing co-operation and mutual confidence on the prisoners part. Unquestionably the doctor tried to do good, as some of us prisoners had reason to apprehend but he was in many cases tied down to regulations and ~~in~~re instructed in medical supplies to an exceptional degree. Had he reasonable power, equipment and material he could have done some good for the sick. He was, probably not unnaturally enraged at the way some of the prisoners treated him. One would, perhaps in course of time, and under more congenial circumstances, pull with him, and he could be very understanding and attentive, as some of us who were patients had some little reason to appraise.

Regarding the patients in the hospital - three in number; Paddy Hobbs from Dublin, was undergoing treatment for gunshot or shrapnel wounds received at one of the windows; McAuley from Belfast or Derry and the writer. For several weeks we lingered there when one a happy September morning we were bundled out of our prison hospital and with the other prisoners sent upon another journey. That removal came about in a rather mysterious manner. The night previous the medical orderly informed us that "the prisoners were to be removed to Gormanstown". Before daybreak the following morning the doctor imparted the news officially. "But" he declared "I dont know whether you (meaning the three of us) will be able to travel". We tried to impress upon him that we would.. Dr. McNabb to give him his due, naturally gave into us. Nay, more than that, he assisted in making us ready by supplying

each of us with a strong egg flip, well flavoured with whiskey; after which we were dressed. Meanwhile we had become aware that the prisoners in the wing opposite were already alive and assembled, judging by the hubbub which their every movement seemed to convey. Then when the noise subsided somewhat we were duly brought through the passage-way and to the street, placed in an open motor tender and blankets placed around us. Oh! refreshing sight and refreshing rejuvenating air, every whiff of which brought new life and vigour to us.

Our procession proceeded citywards along John's Road which runs parallel to the Great Southern Railway; we huddled, cuddled in our warm blankets in the lorry. The rest of the prisoners stepped it out in style, bearing their few personal belongings and escorted by a plentitude of armed soldiers and armoured cars and motor lorries. Only an add individual passed us, paying us scant attention and possibly caring less for our travail or our cause, and unimpressed by your presence there. The sound of marching feet was as music to our ears. If one could only close one's ears to the less musical sounds of motor engines, with their whirring throbbing, jarring notes, that these mechanical contrivances imparted, and even forgot for the briefest moment that the contingent of marching men were of two classes, unarmed prisoners and armed escorts, to what extent and to what heights could imagination be stirred. What would our reactions be to behold again a company or two of Volunteers, our Volunteers, marching along that road, or any familiar Irish road, "at ease" singing or whistling to their hearts content, or "at attention", making the hard road ring to the sound of their steady measured tread and in the words of our famous whistling whistling song: "Left, right, left, right, steady boys and step together". How often in the past were we

thrilled beyond comparing and with deepest emotion to almost the realm of ecstasy at the proud soldierly bearing, the drum-like military precision and the even exact stride of our men as they marched intently, proudly and objectively along any of the roads of which we were so familiar, especially around Cabra, Finglas, Glasnevin or Ballymun districts! Scores of times within the past six years we had thus traversed those roads, each succeeding time no different than its predecessor, with the self same feeling and quite similar emotions. Yet each was set apart, a thing apart, the thrill of it enduring because each was separate and each was decidedly distinctive.

Could our minds go back to those great occasions and dwell on those brave selfless men, what vivid memories would be unfolded. Even in the lorry, as a prisoner then, such scenes flashed across my memory and I fancied I saw them - every man known to me, every face, every name came to me, even those who had departed, to let us pray their heavenly home; those who are still living. One could still see them all on a wild frosty night in winter or on a warm sunny evening in summer, in season, out of season, swinging along oblivious of personal cares, difficulties and anxieties; oblivious even of the dangers attaching to their marchings and their "illegal drillings and manoeuvres", their only regard being to serve Ireland - to make her free. How could mortal eradicate such happy and wholesome memories or any of the other phases of our great and glorious past that float on the wings of time or send echoing sounds on the winds.

On such a morning as that, as we wended our way into further captivity, I could be pardoned for relapsing into meditation for a brief period; perhaps to dwell on the past, to dream sweet dreams on the might-have-beens and

to relive the previous years, in service, in endeavour and in loyalty for our national heritage. Such period of reverie was soon brought to an end when, at the end of John"s Road, we espied a few human beings,about a half dozen nurses who were standing on a balcony or looking out of windows of Steevens Hospital. We could not know whether they were pleased or displeased with us. They did not demonstrate their true feelings but stood there as our cavalcade moved by. Their faces were nevertheless pleasant to behold.
One could not nor would not imagine them being anything but nice and gentle and kind, so typical of their calling and their work of mercy. Good luck to you all, and may you never know the cares and worries of a prison life. If, by chance, there be any among you feeling sorrow for our plight, or otherwise think us fools, let your thoughts be tempered with charity, and should you give one moment"s reflection on us, poor wayfarers, just preserve your peace of mind and say: "Well after all, they (meaning us) are in a bad way now; we wish them well and pray they see better days". To such kind sentiments we would recriprocate and say "Amen. May peace and happiness be your store forever!"

Turning to the left and again to the left we reach the platform of Kingsbridge Station. Actually we are being hurried. The waiting train is there to receive us and we are bundled into several compartments; bundled was the proper word to describe the occasion, for we had hardly started to entrain when, to our great surprise shots rang out, and amid the excitement and the confusion that they created, the armed guards with much ado, took up battle positions. Some of them showed small concern for, or attention to, their prisoners, while the officers were "Bawling their heads off" issuing commands, which in many instances were drowned by the mad careering of the armoured cars, as they sped up - down and about the platform and environs of the railway. "We are being attacked" exclaimed one of the few guards rear of the train to the enemy "What's on" by an inquisitive prisoner. It was hard indeed, for the prisoners to believe or even know that it was truly an attack, as most of the shooting seemed to come from the soldiers in or about the platform, every one of which elicited shouts, cheers and cheers from the prisoners, who throughout the proceedings were taking special delight in haranguing the troops engaged in such a warlike display. The general impression among the prisoners was that it was not an attack at all;

if anything it was only sniping and of a very mild form but the strange part of the proceeding was that it only started when we arrived at the station.

When, eventually, the din of battle subsided our train was got into motion and we sped along through the Liffey Junction going citywards again to the odd accompaniment of rifle shots fired from time to time by our guards, presumably at some of the prisoners who were putting their heads out of windows. From our position, at the end of the train we were not able to know much about the doings of the other prisoners. Unfortunately for us, who occupied a kind of reserved status, a "reserved carriage", the separation imposed a burden for it meant our being denied the pleasant and friendly companionship, the banter and occasional sing-song, which we could but faintly hear in the distance indulged in by the other prisoners. These seemed to mock us and to say "You unlucky beggars, though sad is our common fate, yours is by far the worse role, and yet we knew that any of these our comrades would, had they the choice, have given much to cheer us on the say. On our part, in our strange isolation, we wished them merry troubadours, a very

pleasant time on this journey. May the minutes, and the hours that you have to spare with your "guardians" be well and truly spent as somehow we think they will because, knowing your spirit and your capabilities, we have a hunch that you will make light of the burden ~~of~~ harshly imposed, a journeying under such none too pleasant conditions. The very aptitude of the words "Are we down-hearted?" and the eagerly responsive "No!" suitably amplified our feelings on such an occasion.

En route in travelling the railway journey passed many familiar haunts and landmarks - Broom Bridge, and King James' Castle, where we fought many a "sham battle" or trained our men; Glasnevin Cemetry, where reposes in the sleep of peace our patriot dead; Mountjoy Jail - the Irish Bastile of the Executioners skill and the quick lime graves and the then prison abode of Irish Republican. These serve to remind us of the chequered history or Ireland. Praise and glory to you all the felons of our land! Further on the way we passed Croke Park in fond remembrances of many a happy hour well spent there looking at the cream of Irish manhood in many a football and hurling contest; or in sad remembrance of that Bloody Sunday in November 1920 when alien hands and bullets effected a cruel holocaust. Then, while meditating on those and other things we arrived at Amiens Street railway station, irony of ironies, back to the exact spot where almost three months before, some dozen of us had spent the first days and nights of our captivity.

This time, however, we were not detained long, only such time as it takes to perform a few minor shunting operations and a change over of the engine. Then we proceed via the Clontarf embankment where the guards

disported themselves in firing point blank on many an innocent seagul or a possibly less innocent prisoner's head or hanky that wittingly or unwittingly appeared at some of the windows. Soon that place was passed and other railway stations ticked off when at last we arrived at our destination - the Railway station at Gormanston, Co. Meath. Arriving there the main contingent of prisoners proceeded on foot to the camp while we were conducted in a "tin Lizzie" to the hospital, conducted with a fair sprinkling of soldiers as an escort with a few officers standing on the foot boards of the motor. The latter seemed highly elated and enthusiastic at the change. One of them in particular, Captain George Ashton, declaring the new venue to be "a regular home from home". Home from home, indeed, when a few moments later we came in close contact with the barbed-wired fencing surrounding what was to be our "Internment Camp. Some fifty yards ahead was the hospital. It was also surrounded by barbed wire, at which place we were duly deposited and put to bed, left to our own mediatations.

Next day we were informed that our clothing was to be taken away as a precaution against our escaping! Actually a dozen or so of the prisoners had escaped the day before. It was so simply done that perhaps the escapees must have thought it too good to be true! Entering the barbed wire entrance to the camp and proceeding to another part left unprotected gave them just the opening they wanted and so Tom Barry and some others liberated themselves that way. It was puzzling to know how any of us could have had the strength to do so when already we were sufficiently medically unfit. Our protests were unavailing. The doctor could not do anything in the face of the orders issued by the Camp authorities. As a protest we decided

to leave the hospital, electing to enter the main camp where our comrades were interned. Thus, despite the entreaties of the doctor and plamáis on the part of the officers we returned to the fold, thereby removing the risk of being denied further medical assistance should the authorities deem such advisable in our case. Mention must here be made also, of the fact that in taking action in that way we objected to be completely isolated from our comrades.

The powers that held sway over us saw to it that we were suitably and appropriately interned by serving each prisoner with a copy of an "Internment Order" as issued by the "Minister of Defence" Richard Mulcahy.

Many of us were not unfamiliar with the phraseology, the terms and conditions governing Internment Orders. Some had had similar facsimile documents served on them at one or other periods of the Independence Fight. It mattered not the source, the name of the respective "competent military authority" or the detailed reason assigned in issuing the order. They all seemed to speak the same language and to mean the same thing. To many of our men there was a certain similarity and familiarity between each "copy" which in many respects represented just one difference, the particular phase of the fight as it was being waged. Comparisons are always odious tis said: in respect to this Internment Order of 1922 comparison was limited to the extent that it bore the signature of the Irish Competent authority in Gaelic, whereas previous orders emanating from the British authority were signed in English.

Chapter 29.

So we became consciously aware of the realities of our situation; aware, too, that we had passed another milestone on the road to destiny to which we had set our faces and from which, short of dishonour or disgrace, retreat was impossible. We had to face up to our responsibilities and to accept the many burdens imposed on us; to run the camp in our own way and for the general welfare of the prisoners. By that arrangement the prisoners themselves exercised complete control in the internal affairs of the camp, a happy departure from the previous system of control and administration as practised in Kilmainham when we were made dependent on cooks, plumbers etc. for our well-being. The new order of things prescribed that the prisoners undertake to cook their own meals, do their own laundry, the care and maintenance of the huts, sanitary and hygienic arrangements and many other matters connected with internment camps. Little difficulty was found in securing men for the various types of work - cooks and cook assistants, butchers and kitchen helpers; the provision of a medical service, a postal service, a police force, and chief of all, we had to create or elect a Prison Camp Council, one of whom was to be Camp Commandant. So it came to pass that Brigadier Oscar Traynor, O.C. Dublin Brigade became our Camp Commandant with Paddy Holohan O.C. 1st Battalion as Vice Commandant, Sean McEntee as Adjutant, Seamus Brisbane of the Cork Brigade as Quartermaster, Patrick Kirk of "C" Company 1st Battalion as Police Officer, Martin Finn "C" Company 1st Battalion as Medical Officer, Sean T. O'Kelly, Mick Tannam and Simon Donnelly and Mick Smith were members of the Camp Council. Frank Scott was in charge of the Post Office while special men were delegated officers in

charge of various establishments, cookhouse, dining rooms, wash-houses etc.

The Camp consisted of huts of varied design and character. A hut leader and in some cases an assistant leader controlled each but at least two of the larger huts "L" and "M" which housed about eighty men each consisted mainly of men of the Dublin Brigade. Captain Gerry Golden of "I" Company, 1st Battalion was in charge of "L". Eugene O'Reilly, I think, was in charge of "M" hut. Captain Bob Oman of "G" Company, 1st Battalion was in charge of another hut which was mostly composed of men from the country. In our "L" hut were included besides the hut leader, Gerry Golden, the M.O. and police officer, Paddy Mahon, Paul Brady, Jimmy Freeney, Tom Hahesy, Jimmy McA_ndle, Seamus McGuinness, Larry O'Connor, Bertie Somerville, Bill Kelly, Paddy Byrne (of "H" Company) "Lashers" Byrne, Austin Eustace, Joe Carroll, Sean Connolly, Stephen O'Connor, Liam Lucas, John Hughes, Paul Dernin, Tom and Tim Rohan, Gabriel O'Brien, "Lightening Byrne, James McSherry, Emmet Humphries, Ginger Carroll. Other Gormanstown Camp characters of importance were Simon McInerney of the Kerry Brigade fame, Simon Donnelly of Kilmainham Escape fame and former O.C. of the Republican Police, Frank Gallager, publicist of the "Irish Bulletin", Seamus McGovern, Citizen Army, Joe Considine Joe Cripps of the 5th Engineers, Fred Cogley, Jim Cotter, Sean Moynihan.

The Camp Staff occupied a special hut termed "O" Hut that was situated at one end of the Camp, between "L" and "M" huts. That became our Camp Headquarters. Of the other huts it may be necessary to mention that they were capable of accommodating various numbers of prisoners; each of the four larger kinds bore four rows

of twenty beds, a foot space between each. a passageway divided each second row running the length of the hut to the entrances. These huts were divided by a centre partition thus dividing the hut into two equal parts. The huts were roomy even with that number of men, well ventilated, bright and well provided with windows. Wash-houses and toilets were situated in the "compound" set between each two huts, the shower baths, and hot water supply occupied a position near headquarters. The four end wooden huts served different purposes, tailors shop, and class rooms. The dining halls were situated at the lower and upper ends of the camp respectively. The lower one was utilised for the celebration of mass the recital of the rosary and other religious devotions. the other one as a concert and lecture hall.
An Army Chaplain assisted by a priest from the outside was appointed to minster to the spiritual wants of the prisoners, a number of prisoners serving as acolytes. The men generally responded fittingly to spiritual affairs and devotions. Masses on Sundays, weekdays, holydays and all religious services were well attended. Quite a large number of men frequented the sacraments, many of them being weekly and daily communicants. Then again numbers of them promoted and assisted at Novenas, the Nine Fridays and other special devotions. In many instances the Rosary was recited by the men in the huts before the "lights out" signal. While these were being carried on in the Catholic interest the spiritual needs of the Protestant community, which hardly consisted of a dozen members, were catered for. One of the wooden huts at the upper end of the Camp served as a Church for such occasions. The Protestant Minister, in the course of his ministrations, became quite a frequent visitor to the Camp. So that in every sense facilities were available to preserve the moral fibre, and to sustain the men spiritually.

Sports, amusements of many kinds, and games were indulged in, and encouraged, in order to maintain a healthy physical and mental morale of the prisoners. Gaelic football tournaments and handball contests, formed the main outdoor exercise, while draughts, chess, solo whist, rings and bridge, and various other card games were well to the fore for indoor games. Concerts and plays conducted by the Camp Dramatic Society were held in the evenings. In connection with these stage productions we lacked nothing in artistry or artists. Johnny Markey, a painter by trade, "doing" the scenic effects, Paddy Kirk, also a painter by trade, who in turn had some stage experience, acting as Stage Manager, Coach and Prompter combined. Markey's best work though fabricated with improvised and poor rate materials, was noticeable in stage flaps, curtains and wings, Thought we, if ever there was a genius Johnny was such a one, for he could give the right setting and the right touch to his landscapes or his decorative flourishes, par excellence, and in so doing won our praise and indebtedness for work well and truly accomplished.

Besides these many other natural forms of relaxation were availed of to kill time or keep mind and hand occupied; each man or some of them lending themselves to practice certain hobbies, or occupational pursuits such as the manufacture of toys, works of art and of utility. The making of ladies hand bags; mantel borders, purses, table centres and tea cosies, from macrami twine of various colourings and designs became a regular craze which gripped many of our fraternity. Other no less ornamental and decorative work was carried out by means of silk threads and wool. Embroidary mask floor rugs and mats were carried out by a few prisoners.

Woodcraft and articles made from pieces of bone, engraving and etchings on these and on metal were reserved fro the highly artistic. Pride of place must go to those who made rings from silver or copper coins. Quite a number of men became handy and useful "crafts men"; but chief genius of them all was Paddy Trant who was a veritable master of many trades, in token of which he turned out exquisite works of art, engravings and carvings by the score.

Autumn passed, We spent our first winter generally confined to the four cardinal points of the Camp proper. Our close proximity to the sea and the fact that the Camp was situated in open country and consisted of many open spaces gave the place a far different aspect and a totally opposite picture or appearance of a "home from home". We soon felt winter's rusty biting stings of dampness and rain of cold sleet. Soon frost and harsh winds. Generally intensely cold outside, hardly less so inside the huts. Overcoats and raincoats were requisitioned from our real homes. A very inadequate supply of coal for the fires in the huts did not tend to improve our lot. So small was the fuel ration that it had to be "nursed" not so much for space heating as to afford a tinipot warm glow for cold hands and shivering, shaking limbs, which, in the real bad weather and long nights were denied enough invigorating exercise to keep the blood in proper circulation or when some of the ration was used for making simple"buck-shee" meals. Seldom did our fuel ration suffice to keep the home fires burning for more than a couple of hours each night and even hardly that long if the four fires which adorned the larger huts were kept going. In many instances additions to the supply were made by clinkers or cinders and other burnable materials from the cook-house or around the camp. Recourse too was had to brain-wave experiments one of which was the "manufacture" of fire briquettes,

composed of yellow clay and a nondescript supply of coal slack cinders and ashes combined. When the briquettes were prepared and eventually tested they produced heat for a time that was far too short as the amount of yellow clay far exceeded the other component parts, and at such times we had little pleasure in coming down to earth again with little further hope of replenishing our meagre feul supply

These "domestic" troubles and worries were of small moment during dry days or evenings when we could keep the "blood up" by various outdoor pastimes or long periods of walking around or through the camp. Sometimes those same walks could be carried to extremes and more resembled endurance tests by speeding, or by making extensive demands on "shanks mares" until one became thoroughly tired and mayhaps completely exhausted. How some of us enjoyed those long walks - when they were carried out in proper and in ordinary pacing. At such times men mated their best companions - their "out in the world" ones or of the new-formed camp variety - two, three or more walking the rounds of the camp together; some going at slow, snail's pace, some quickly and some at a canter, passing and being passed by others on the way, and all fully bent on where they were going. That promenading became a regular camp ritual with many of the prisoners. Many an intimate friendship or more ripening bonds of companionship was cemented in that way. Of my many walking companions, one, Bob Oman, was indeed endearing and worthy of mention in this chronicle of events. "Bob" was as sound, as solid and as staunch a type of character as was to be found in that camp or in all Ireland. He had a very keen sense of humour and an easy quiet disposition and a fine manly disposition. He could be the life of any party or gathering with his rollicking jokes, his jests

and his funplay giving and taking them in return and with the right spirit. Not infrequently he let himself go in a bit of a caper or horse play, enjoying them to the full, whether he was the instigator or the victim of the "devilment".

Bob was as I have already mentioned, Captain of "G" Company, 1st Battalion, Dublin Brigade, from about 1919, having taken over from Peadar Clancy, who had been former O.C. of the Company prior to his appointment as Vice O.C. of the Dublin Brigade. None could gainsay that Captain Oman did not serve his Company and the I.R.A. other than loyally and consistently. As an Officer he was a silent undemonstrative energetic type; one of those people, perhaps, who was absolutely non-conceited but of a very humorous and humane mould that preferred to do things without any semblance of show or hullabaloo. So singularly free and easy in his manner and method of approach he was quite dependable for any work that called for dash and courage. Knowing him over a period of years in the military sphere or as a man about town our friendships became mutually established but it was not until the period of internment that the most solid and intimate companionship ripened between us. I accordingly treasured him as a fellow officer, as an intimate friend and a bosom companion, so trustworthy, so true and so sincere was he.

Captain "Bob" Oman had been "caught" or arrested on the "Bridges job" a term that was then used to describe a military operation as planned by the I.R.A. to isolate Dublin. The main object of the plan was to blow up and destroy all the canal and railway bridges surrounding Dublin in order to interfere with and interrupt road and railway communications between Dublin and other parts of the country; in other words to hit a fatal blow at the

Free State forces in their conduct of military operations against the I.R.A. It appears that on the night appointed for carrying out of the operation, several hundred men of the I.R.A. had been mobilised. Quite a large number of these were men of the 1st Battalion, Dublin Brigade whose allotted task it was to put Broom Bridge, Cabra, out of commission. Some of these men were already posted in the fields nearby, awaiting the psychological moment for action; other men were making their way along the Royal canal or by ancillary routes. To their (the I.R.A.men's) utter surprise and dismay the Free Staters had complete control of the scene an armoured car patrolling the area, opening fire right, left and centre at point blank range. Bob Oman like a number of other men of the "First" was caught while moving along to the scheduled spot. Thus many men were trapped; the men in the fields being pinned down to the point of utter frustation, the men who were making their way thither chased or captured some quite easily and others after a grim fight, many of them like Oman quite invaluable officers and men.

Needless to remark the bridges job failed at that point. A like story could be told of other places. Bob Oman and other men who had been later lodged with us in Gormanston felt sore over the whole transaction, not so much because of any apparent or real failure on their part but because of the feeling that the Free Staters had prior knowledge of the plans which they subsequently made good use of against the I.R.A. move on that particular night. Judging by the accounts that failure had a most weakening effect on at least the 1st Battalion and at a time when men were so urgently required, those who remained true though not enormous in number were up to their neck in the fighting. The strain, nevertheless, was terrific;

so difficult and so hazardous was the pace and the occasion of the guerilla warfare, which the fighting had assumed since the first week of the "civil war". Not the least of the troubles confronting the fighting men outside was the number of resignations tendered during that time - our company being computed to have less than a score of effective men on its roll of membership. My information at the time suggested that that small group was genuinely active, fighting under most extreme and arduous conditions, and according to the source from which the news emanated "giving a good account of themselves."

It was obvious that the Republican forces in the Dublin Brigade area had actually embarked on a guerilla war campaign in much the same fashion as was carried out during the previous Anglo-Irish war. In many instances they showed more boldness, initiative and took greater chances than previously. One could not but wonder how they could carry on at all in the face of extreme adversity and opposition, ever manifest by what seemed to be an uneven contest. The men fighting outside were during that period more "up against it" than hitherto, confronted as they were with a foe that knew many of the tricks of the game. It was a very sinister fact that the Staters, being of native mould, as well as being former friends of many I.R.A. men, then arrayed against them, profited well in the military sphere by keeping our men who were well known to them, to move about underground, with greater caution, circumspection and camouflage. Not the least notable advantage in their (the Staters) favour was the additional strength occasioned by a recruitment of men to their ranks, of which not a few were ex-British Officers, N.C.Os. and rank and filers. Then again, the populace, because of the political issue, hatred

and fear were less friendly to our forces.

Information was available that many people who otherwise professed faith in our cause and friendliness to our men were afraid to help, to support or succour us because of the threats of dire punishment for so doing. These and many other barriers and imposts did not improve the situation in which our fighting men outside found themselves involved. Sometimes as was explained it was "hard to know who were your friends or who were your enemies", so few were the former and so many the latter in numbers and in relation to co-operative enthusiasm and service. It appeared also that a virtual vendetta had been set up and predominated the land. Yes, despite that and from out that maelstrom more than one instance was advanced to believe the vast disparity existing between the Free Staters or National Army and the I.R.A. Uninfluenced by numbers, personnel or attributes the I.R.A. if only modestly supported and armed were standing well up to the trials and giving fight by a widening range of activity throughout the country. One very adverse difficulty that was causing grave havoc to their forces was the mounting losses of officers due to arrests, but it was commented by men who had just recently come into the camp that in many cases replacements had been effected by substitutes who were showing sufficient zeal and energy to carry on affairs. To many of us it looked as if the greatest danger lay not so much in too few men but rather in officers if the mounting scale of arrests and internments were to continue for long knowing that there was no way of augmenting losses by recruiting additional and suitable men.

We became aware, also, that the women who supported our cause outside were being utilised to assist the

fighting men in many militant undertakings. The information that became available suggested that they played a big part in transporting arms and other warlike materials to points selected for ambushing etc. and in secreting and saving them afterwards; that without the women's help the men would have found it increasingly difficult to carry on the fight. The Free Staters, however, had got somewhat wise to that, with the result that they arrested a large number of women interning them in the North Dublin Union Buildings in North Brunswick Street, Dublin. That innovation in the warfare being maintained outside conveyed the impression that the fighting men were being hard put to it both from the point of view of manpower and manoeuvreability.

One very striking feature of the situation as far as the employment of women on such dangerous work was concerned was that it was conducted according to plan. It could not be claimed, nevertheless, that the women were universally and always so utilised but only for special reasons and for particular duties. In many instances some of the women showed themselves superbly keen for militant activity and indeed, in taking equal and no less greater risks than the men. Once they were got going in that way nothing and certainly not any measure of gentle persuasion could stop them. Cases were even cited where some women kept cooler heads than the men in the face of impending or actual shooting or when an ambush was carried off. Then they would sally off carrying the guns and sometimes guiding the men to safety. We were informed that many a man owed his life and his liberty to the presence of mind and valuable assistance of "the weaker sex", on many such dangerous occasions or missions.

If those women earned and deserved the approbation of the I.R.A. outside they in an opposite sense were dubbed by the Free Staters as "these wild women". Yet they were not as wild as they were computed to be; their wildness actually sprung from a desire to help the I.R.A. cause, a wildness that was none the less characteristic then as during the previous regime. Already we were made aware of some of their work which covered a wide field, from collecting monies for our dependants, the despatch of parcels to the prisoners in jail and camps, to the holding of public meetings in support of the Republican cause and to protest against the incarceration of and treatment of the prisoners in general.

Every additional incoming internee coming to the camp imparted news and information on affairs outside. Sometimes snatches of news from outside sources penetrated through secret channels or from some of the Free State garrisons and of course there were always rumours - Dame Rumour was a real live busy body in Gormanston - in our huts, in the alleys and by roads of our encampment. Due to the provenders of rumours, a good deal of these rumours were circulated for fun, to rile or to rise other people. They touched on many subjects besides our internment, on the fighting outside on political matters and of all things the question of early releases at the time when the latter was a Doomsday dream.

Plainly the practical joker had a fair field for exercising his talent in such a place, Some of the most outlandish stories were put on their rounds, started by some wag or other for the benefit of others who were over eager for information. Of course victims were sometimes found to "swallow" the news, that always bore the earmark of reliability! Unfortunately soft people were to be

found there to fall for such blarney as the rumour mongers conjectured. But not all the internees were so soft or so easily taken in to believe every story they heard although some of them for fun's sake caught on to the rumours or news and spread them further afield. Fun too was got in other ways by the application of various titles and descriptions to camp personalities. Thus we had an O.C. of Rumours, an O.C. of Whistlers, an O.C. of Showers, an O.C. of Dishes, etc.

One of the greatest wags of the camp and he who bore the name of "O.C. of Rumours" was Tommy Curran, a small carefree, full of humour character, who singularly served in "G" Company, 1st Battalion outside under Captain Bob Oman and in Bob's hut in Gormanston. Tommy had always the "best news", would always impart information in as a simple direct manner and when the news was pleasant in a most pleasant way and with great gusto. He got away with some of them for a time until he was found out or his stories fell flat for even the best things in life do not last indefinitely. So there came a time when his stock in trade became a particular cause for amusement to all and sundry. Another Camp personality was "Poor old Paddy Byrne" nicknamed the O.C. of Whistles. He was around fifty years old but he was of a sturdy and active mould that would put men of half his age or some of the young teens to shame. If anything he was younger in spirit and awareness to most people were we to take into account that he was the first man to rise in the mornings and the last almost to retire to bed Not alone that but he was first to set foot in the compound to sound the "early morn "reveille " whistle signal and the last one to bring the men back to their huts prior to "Lights out". He had other duties to perform during the day; all of which he carried out to the letter of the law. Paddy, in

other words was the right man in the right place - not suggesting, of course, that Gormanston Internment Camp was that right place for him. If ever there was a man who knew his duties and was alive to his responsibilities that one was Paddy Byrne. Very few men could have taken such a keen interest in his calling so much and so well as he. Hail, rain, sunshine or darkness, Paddy was on the job.

The biggest complaint some of us "sleepy heads" had was that he was too thorough and too exact to time, too early and too punctual in awakening us from our reveries in the mornings. How he could make that, what to some was an infernal, whistle sound anything but musical notes through our hut to go on his rounds through the camp to the disgust, annoyance and execration of the "weary Willies" and tired Tims, who, truth to tell would have rather lingered on in bed for just another little while. "What a horrid nuisance he is" was the verdict of quite a number "Wish he would lose that whistle" was more generally expressed. No one would wish him to lose his watch, although it seemed to always register the right time; that and even the whistle might, if lost, have been replaced by the Camp Council. Or indeed to hope and wish that he would sleep late, the next nearest thing to an impossibility as far as Paddy was concerned. Withal, there was very very little consolation in covering one's head in bed covering or otherwise trying to shut out the forbidden noise or by friendly and not too friendly protests or missiles directed towards him. Against such sorties he could retaliate by blowing harder, shriller and more vehement, whistle blasts To give him his due no trumpeter could stick to his post as steadfastly as he, and thats paying him no mean tribute Added to that, was the writers knowledge of the man since

1917 when he joined the O'Flanagan Sinn Fein Club and later when he enrolled as member of our "C" auxilliary company became attached to "H" Company, 1st Battalion. In the latter body he was an associate of Kevin Barry and Frank Flood the two young I.R.A. Martyrs. For a man of his type I had every reason to believe he was a good and dutiful Irish Volunteer.

"Root" Morris as "O.C. of Showers, was another of our Camp notabilities. His duty consisted of keeping "steam up" in the wash-house, to supply hot water for the shower baths and for "laundry" and various domestic needs. The O.C. of Showers personified service without tears and knashing of teeth, as when for instance he religiously "banked" down the furnace for the hardy, sometimes the much too hardy early morning shower bathers, of which there were a few in our hut, who even in the depth of winter, made it a habit to indulge in a daily "plunge" or douche whichever was the more appropriate term. To us, the unitiated and unenthusiastic, such galavanting was anything but desirable or commending. It was so to speak incongrous while the rest of the community of tired and tiring souls sought the comfort of blankets plus other types of improvised bed clothes for warmth and comfort. In that way our praise for the "O.C. of Showers" service during the day was reduced to a lament for his more than expressive thoroughness in providing hot water for the first-thing-in-the-morning-bathers. After all, as some opined, he bore some mark of responsibility for encouraging the latters feats of darking and for our reactions to such exhibitions and exhibitors of that cult. Who could, for instance, look on some of these exponents of the daily bathe and feel happy as a result? Who could witness the almost super-human abandon of say Jimmy McArdle in tossing himself out

bed and in scanty attire pass through the hut and across the compound to the wash-house; then when his ablutions were completed, return to gaily exclaim "Icicles! - the water is like icicles" and feel other than shivery and shaky, especially when even in bed we were not much above the zero degree. Surely it was a big price to pay for a service that was constantly and untiringly rendered by a painstaking and diligent O.C. of Showers.

Other types of characters were to be found in our Camp, each of different calibres, qualities and capabilities, the mild no less than the wild. Occasionally the latter species predominated the scene. No internment camp could be complete without its quota of wild, noisy and crazy spirits. Possibly a camp could not be a camp at all if its inmates were all of the quiet, gentle, and free from blame types of individuals. It certainly did appear as if ours was no worse than most others and as we were just ordinary - or were we extraordinary? - folk, human and possessed of all human qualities and frailities. It was hardly possible that the process of separating the chaff from the wheat could even have been carried out to any great extent or with any measure of success. Perhaps it would not have been a feasible policy to try it. Hence we were thrown in as a bunch and a mixed variety.

None the less the "wild spirits" had most of the play, most of the time. They made it their business to be always heard and generally seen too. What they lacked in other things, they made up in noise, the creation and excitement of which was their pet hobby. Pandemonium resulted at times, propelled and produced for fun. They hardly ever seemed to be at ease or easy.

Sometimes the outbursts took different forms and were of various kinds, singing bouts, cat-calls, shouting, tussles, bedding fights and heaves. The latter consisted of overthrowing or unbending beds and bedding, and tossing them about the hut. The disarranging of one or two beds in that way was followed by retaliation and a regular all-in fight in which quite a number of men would become involved and of course participate. Soon the hut would become a complete shambles and an absolute mess, the men no less than the materials showing evidence of the orgy. Then when the spate of fun and frolic was over the job began of trying to extricate ones personal property which as often as not got entangled with other peoples in the ensuing confusion.

When a situation like that arose and was given full play gentle persuasion went by the boards, which even the threats and blandishments of those in charge of the effected hut were ineffective to stop or control. In many instances it had to run its full course, generally ending as it started in right good humour. Where such was the case nothing was lost, and nothing gained, except the "fun" that accrued from it. It was such fun when carried out and accepted in that spirit! Little quarter was given and little requested. Whether you took what was coming to you in good or bad grace hardly ever mattered. You had no option but to engage in the affray, make the most of it, and put up with the consequences. Significantly enough there were no set rules governing bouts of that description, so all one had to do was to rely on a certain amount of horse-sense and use strategy. The more pummelling you gave the other fellow the better was the prospect of winning through - not that it always happened that a person acting thus ever and always succeeded in obtaining an advantage favourable to himself.

That form of fun-play, though it was at times a nuisance had a brightening aspect in our lines. It sometimes made hut life unbearable temporarily. On the other hand it gave a certain stimulation to the mental and physical make up of men who ordinarily active human beings, were confined into small space with hardly a proper outlet for their energies or full expression to their feelings, not to mention the amount of fun they invariably got out of these seemingly wild pranks. It was well however, that these scenes were entered into and accepted in good, sportsmanlike manner, wherein bad blood and ill feeling was reduced to a minimum, although at times they were rough in the extreme and looked threatening indeed. Thanks to the fine spirit displayed by all concerned, nothing serious occurred to mar the happy brotherliness of our communal camp existence.

Internment at any time is a trying ordeal. To those interned it is a burden, a bugbear and a nightmare combined, which, notwithstanding, has to be borne as joyfully and manly as possible. Life in an internment camp can be tolerable or intolerable according to the desires, the caprices and the whims of the internees. The almost too-regular routine of daily life, the acquisition of little work and too much time on hands to do it inherent in the system, tends to weaken morale, to cause inertia and a sense of frustration if not the breeding of laziness in individuals. It is the simplest thing in the world for internees to fall into disuse under the spell of the internment code, which is an instrument devised and exercised to keep within measurable bounds and under visible or invisible restraint, while affording just enough breathing space and liberty to recalcitrant spirits to exist on abundant fresh air with a food ration barely sufficient to sustain life were one to be totally

dependant on the table fare supplied without the supplementary parcels from home. Besides these essentials one's liberty suffered rationing to the extent of prescribed communication with the outside world. The regulations permitted prisoners to write two letters per week. Such was the curtailment that a half sheet of ordinary ruled notepaper was allowed, special emphasis being placed on writing only on the lines and never between the lines. Our correspondence was always subject to strict censorship, a very deliberate device which was intended to keep the internees within bounds and as a safeguard against leakage of information of a disagreeable or obnoxious nature, affecting the interests of the State etc.

By means of that powerful weapon internees were confined to the narrowest margin, their minds, their imaginations and their wills being regulated according to set standards. The net result of this was that internees suffered in default thereby. Free thought and the free expression of opinion, which the average citizen associated with the liberty of the subject and the inalienable rights of men were glaringly negatived by the imposed rule of censorship. Internees, however, had no other choice in the matter except to comply. Failure to do so generally reacted against the offending one whose correspondence was held up or the offending passages ruthlessly deleted by means of blue pencils or scissors to the partial or complete mutilation of the otherwise precious missive. That censorship of correspondence had, of course, two sides to it, like the aforementioned letter the humourousand the serious side. Even in an internment camp, as in other places, men may be found to make or to get fun out of anything. We were, perhaps, no different to the rest. The fact that there were men

amongst us who saw humour in that situation and were in themselves game for fun was symbolestic of the trend of their feelings and of affairs in general. Some of these availed of the opportunity to keep the censor quite busy, by writing letter on political and camp topics that no earthly chance of being "passed"; others wrote for the censors personal "benefit" intending to add an extra spice of flavour to the meat of unkindness. That there were some such people who were animated with so little regard and consideration for the invisible cypher "the rubber stamp celebrity" which symbolised the office of Camp Censor the following anecdote amply demonstrates.

One particular internee was in the habit of writing to "his dear spouse" in other words his good wife. There was nothing particularly wrong or extraordinary in his so doing or for his making use of the most affectionate and endearing terms for the occasion, even at the risk of causing the censor a number of fits of emotion for "loves young (or old) dream" or wafting him into a state of ecstacy for the "poor poor dears". But that is only the introduction to the story, which begins from the point when the aforementioned internee in "posting" the letter in question exclaimed with a certain amount of glee and satisfaction "Thats one for the Censor." "The poor spouse will not get this one. But better luck next time" which always happened. Then it transpired that our friend could not resist the temptation of "telling the censor all about his blind aunt". It must be understood that the reference here to "telling the censor about his blind aunt" did not concern his aunt at all, if or whether she was or was not blind. It referred strictly to "telling the censor", having a good rap at him or crossing swords with him. We were never able to find out how the censor took this "telling off" but some of

us surmised that he winced a bit and felt deeply annoyed at the little personal homilies so rained on his poor cranium and despatched for his individual benefit.

It appears that the offending internee wished to score an odd point or two on him by way of reminder for his past, his political past. Whether the feeling was mutual or not it would have been hard to say; but one thing stood out clearly - our friend would have forfeited many letters - he actually did forfeit quite a few - to give the Censor a piece of his mind, in "a few epistles" as he so often declared. Invariably many of his letters, written in such a style or on such a copic never reached his "dear spouse" The few that did, and some that were returned to him as rejects, were unrecognisable, so much so that the recipient could not fail to be impressed that the censor was a very busy man and quite thorough going.

Not having had the pleasure or displeasure of the good and faithful censor's acquaintance most of us had to be content to view him from a distance and to consider him as an all too invisible being, whose word was law, camp law, who wielded his blue pencil in similar strain to that in in which the poet wrote the praises of "the pen" being "mightier than the sword" and who suffered no affront, no insult or assault to go unchallenged while one blue speck or one drop of ink remained. Mayhaps he looked a tearing, raging, and maddening sight when he dotted his 'Os. and crossed his Ts. or in erazing or mutilating such correspondence. Even a censor has his faults at times, The may be proverbial and perhaps always to the fore, before him, behind him and closely allied to him. To perform his duty well and nobly he may have to find fault with someone at sometine who is not acting according to prescribed regulations. When he does not, as when he closes his

eyes to some leakage of information or some news that should not leak out, his masters will assuredly find fault with him. When he does not the subjects, in fact the letter writer, internee, as in that case, finds with him and so the censor must - well, what must a censor do anyway, but to censor something or other?

That business of censorship caused no end of trouble to the prisoners. It is not always possible to conform to recognised hard and fast standards in letter writing for instance. Everyone has a different way of expressing their thoughts, their feelings, emotions etc. We prison internees were no different to other ordinary folk in that respect. It may be easy for some people to write in a very fluent intelligent style, others in a kind of rigmarole and not a few who throw grace and charm to the winds write from the heart undisguised, in which a spade is called nothing but a spade and drat the consequences. Just as there are people who, wiser in their generation, can effect to put out a smoke screen, use metaphor, and erect a camouflage to disguise their proper meaning and intentions, which may be known at the reception end, and not in between - the in between in this instance being the censor. That, however, takes some doing - it certainly did take some doing "to put it over" on our lively, wide-awake censor, although, mark you, a Camp Censor cannot be quite infallible and it may not be his fault if some little bits of information did get through his sifting and sieving or by devious means and certain unspecified channels of which he had no knowledge. Such things happen, have happened and probably will happen, whenever and however internment camps exist. The adage "there are many ways of killing a duck besides choking him" actually held

true in Gormanston Camp then, in special regard to spreading the news and if anyone could be regarded as the best news provender Jimmy McArdle was that by a long way.

What more aggravating insult could be offered than to receive a letter from a relative or a friend in a tattered, torn mess, or mutilated in such a manner as to make it resemble what, for want of a fitting term, could be called "ducks and drakes" in such a pitiful condition whereby you could not make head, tail or body out of it. More like a riddle or a gig-saw puzzle in words that somehow had got lost or mislaid in some very strange way. Try as you would you would be unable to fathom either what was missing or even try to understand what was left "passed by the censor" Luck favoured you if it was established beyond mortal doubt that, at least, the sender was well, and hoped you were the same, or if you were assured that a parcel was being sent "with fags" and a few edible and otherwise odds and ends thrown in. These things were all one could hope for in letters that were deemed not to be prejudicial to the State or offend Camp regulations.

True not all the letters sent out by the internees suffered that terrible fate. Some, couched in diplomatic or cleverly disguised language, passed the censor's eye, and escaped his pencilling; others of the homechat style wended their way in safety and without molestation. One very big drawback to writing a proper letter, nevertheless, was accentuated by its all too shortened form of the paper supplied which caused many a prisoner to yearn to be allowed the facility to write between the lines, a thing that was strictly prohibited. Sadly, oh, how sadly - we had to accustom ourselves to writing on the lines and refraining from contreversal subjects of which mention of politics was the main proscribed topic and write our

homilies in a very homely way in order not to bring down the wrath of our not over indulgent or undutiful friend, the censor; efforts indeed that put many of us to the pin of our collar and caused us many heart burnings, because we always had the strange feeling that our letters were not so confidential and personal as we wished and hoped them to be. In consequence of this many a loving word had to be omitted and unwritten for fear of tingling or was it possible to tingle? - the heart strings of the cypher behind the scenes.

It was strange - or was it so strange after all? - that we could get accustomed to the mechanical form of writing letters in the one strain on the self same subjects and generally with the same orthodox or unorthodox phraseology. That, at least, wqs the price one had to pay for being couped up inside barbed wires. After a number of repetitions of the stuff one got bored, one's letters became equally boring, there being so little to write about as a rule unless a person was poetic or had a flair for the artistic, qualities that are not always associated with life in an internment camp or of the average internee. How, for instance, would we have inspiration or rise to great heights of imagination or fancy in a place where you saw the same sights, heard the same stories and yarns, breathed the same air and performed the same regular routine daily. Very little variety, beyond an occasional concert, an odd play or games tournament could be recited. Maybe the folks at home had no special grádh for our referneces to those and our various classes of study - Irish, French, Spanish, classes in beginning book-keeping and the provision and conduct of a day school primarily for people not very advanced in education. The latter was a wonderful experiment and unqualified success. After a full and practical term an examination was held

those passing being granted certificates of merit.

In respect of the study of the Irish language it was noteworthy that many men qualified for the Fáinne from one of the classes conducted by Padraig Cahill, son of Art Cahill, Chemist of Lower Dorset Street, the latter a 1916 man. As a teacher, Paddy was energetic, painstaking and better still, proficient in his work of imparting the true blas to a group of us each day, and it was not his fault if he failed to reach the highest peak of fluency and perfection in that sphere of endeavour. These were really "happy moments day by day", a half hour or an hour or so well spent for lessons well chosen and worth the time and the labour involved. That class, which was mooted by us of the Hughes Garrison group was held in the "tailors shop", a hut specially laid aside for the use of Jimmy McArdle and Johnny Hughes for mending and patching the prisoners clothing, "buck shee" in other words for nothing. Like the study of Irish the tailoring was a pure labour of love - and did they love it? We had reason to know that they did. Not alone that but due to the two establishments" the hut became quite a busy place or rendevouz for a number of the "boys" where one could call in without invitation as some did or ceremony and have a pow-wow, a hearty joke and a whiff of gossp. It also served another purpose, to wit, it became a place for some of us to "do our laundry". Perhaps it might not be quite right to call it a laundry but at least it was a good standby in enabling us to perform the duties connected with the wahing of our clothes.

Necessity impelled us to that task. Every Monday some of us washed our dirty linen or other fabrics of which shirts, collars and underclothing are composite parts. That was the washing indeed! As was only too reasonable

to expect there was no hard and fast rule as to the right way of doing the washing. Rather should it be said if permission is given to the use of a pun, that there was, of course, a hard and fast method of doingit, provided one was not very particular about the way it was carried out. But on an average we sought to do a good job although it was a distasteful task enough. Each man had his own way at first but gradually we came around to a kind of fixed standard, the easiest and the quickest system influencing us in the choice. Not that we found the easy way always the easiest or the quick way the quickest. Sometimes we found the work hard enough either ways. "Every cobbler to his last", is a very true maxim. However, easy or quick, swift or hard, we tackled our job thus. Say the night before washing day we steeped our clothes. With most it was a case of jumbling all the washables into a dixie, a kind of galvanised basin, shirts, socks, collars, underclothing, handkerchiefs - all together. Others did it differently by keeping the woollens out. The next day, field washing day, the clothes were duly boiled and rinsed in quick deliberate time. There were times, however, when it was not always as easy or quick as that.. Mark you, in an internment camp ones clothes can get very, very soiled, sleeping between blankets that for all we knew had never been washed since they were put into commission. We couldn't washthem. The Staters would not wash them for us and as we hadn't any charladies to do it for us that matter and mode of cleanliness went by default. When it is considered that a person might have the same set of blankets for months and indeed for years, well, they could not be expected to keep them clean of their own free will. Shaken and tossed they were, of course, to rid them of dust. Yet any good housewife would affirm

that shaking or beating is no substitute for washing. But let us come back to our process of washing, much or little, but very often much, time was spent in rubbing scrubbing and lathering our clothes whichever;was a bothersome job.

One day somebody hit on a brilliant idea of scrubbing them with a good hard brush, After all, we could not be expected to show fine technique in such affairs like our mothers, our wives and sisters; nor the knack, nor the hands nor the wrists for doing a days washing. So when we saw a fellow using a brush on a shirt on a collar or an underclothing, that had to be stretched out on a table for the purpose, when we saw the lovely soapy suds being rubbed and rubbed into the particular items what other thought do you think, came to us but this-shy, that seems a most reasonable way for such work, in maybe quicker time. There seemed, also, a surety of getting the dirty spot out. Who cared whether the things were scrubbed to tatters as they inevitably must, by a method that was anything but gentle or coaxing. We were even tempted to omit rinsing them seeing that we had rubbed them to our hearts content. That is not saying that everyone of the prisoners adopted that course. Some soaked and others did not soak their washing or even permit the fire to take the trouble of boiling them. Again, there was a particular class who were adept in doing the work in an ultra quick motion. So, presto! they packed all their washables in a dixie, brought the water to a boil and taking care to put a few clippings of soap into the water stirred them round and round. Then taking the dixie from the fire gave the clothes a rinsing after which they were placed on a line to dry.

These were the several forms by which the ordeal of washing was conducted - every man according to his own way and fancy - until one day some newer method was introduced by one of our fraternal group to reduced the work to a minimum. A slab of Preservine did the trick! Needless to remark we watched him most carefully going through his washing movements, that also, again, needless to remark, facinating us not a little or quite a lot. He had cut the soap into very fine flakes and placed them in the basin. When the water boiled a lovely liquid of concentrated suds formed. After this he deposited the washables, In this they remained to steep overnight. On the following day he had little to do, as according to him "the soap did the magic trick!" It certainly seemed to some of us, the ideal way, and we accordingly heaped on Paddy Holohan our profound felicitations for the tip!

When Saturday arrived we had to, or our clothes had to undergo the task of ironing. That, to some, was a harder and almost nerve-wrecking experience. "Mac's" iron or goose, stood us in good stead which with his assistance and under his expert direction we managed to manipulate after a good deal of labour. On Saturdays, too, we made it our especial business to give ourselves a good look over in preparation for the next day Sunday - preparation which caused many a week's grown beard to be shaved and many a pair of boots to be cleaned which had not seen the sight of polish or dubbing for as long. Even clothes were brushed and mended, if required. Such a stir it was. Its surprising how men can get fussy in an internment camp. Some who ordinarily were not particularly careful in regard to their personal appearance and toilette on week days here became really busy then. Home habits, perhaps, How hard to break away from these! Everyone was anxious to appear at their best on the Sundays - the Lord's Day and

and they generally did; thus performing a kind of transformation as it were and creating the impression that the camp or the inhabitants of it had undergone a kind of spring cleaning. The scene as the men paraded for early morning count and inspection and their presence at Mass was indeed edifying and wholly satisfactory. Then the full significance of the cleaning and brushing up of the previous day became manifest and understood. Behold a rare and beautiful sight! Even though few of them were attired in the best raiment, and many could only boast of "Martin Henry" suits, as supplied by the camp authorities, heavy army blucher boots, or patched, dishevelled oddments which some goodly time before were regarded as suits, coats or pants. They made a gallant show. Yet the peculiar feature of the occasion typified at least that if they were not in their best Sunday clothes they came as near to it as circumstances permitted.

The scene associated with the men's presence at Mass was a never-to-be forgotten ray, an inspiring and a thrilling one. Perhaps it was no different than it was in Frongoch after the Rising in 1916 or in Ballykinlar the Curragh and other Camps in 1920 - 1921 for such similar scenes had been enacted in each. Those of our men who remembered the scenes at Mass in any of these Camps were bound to be visibly affected and have carried forward golden memories of them. Scenes like these never lose anything by repetition and remembrance. The only difference essayed is the personal, the personnel, the participants, as it were, of the service. Yet, every recurring presentation of the scene conduces to enhance the beauty, to exhibit a picture of rare impressiveness, so brilliant and withal so very, very modest and simple as to be termed extraordinary and bewildering. There were always so many things one could notice to be impressed by

and to comment on the rapt attention displayed by the men during the Divine Sacrifice. Their ardent prayerful and devotional sensitiveness throughout the whole Act of Worship and Sacrifice, testified to the faith that was in them. We who were both participants and witnesses of these edifying and impressive scenes had good reasons for feeling affected thereby, for the celebration of Mass was the most important factor in our existence in that Camp.

Reverting to the question of the "Count". This was conducted first thing in the morning and last thing at night. It was carried out by the Free State Officers, accompanied by one of our staff who went from hut to hut for the purpose of checking up on the personnel comprising the Camp. The prisoners were paraded at their respective beds, the officers passing along counting them. Finding the Count correct we would then be dismissed.

One of the deadletter days in Gormanston Camp was associated with the reporting of the "executions" of our I.R.A. leaders, Rory O'Connor, Liam Mellows, Dick Barrett and Joe McKelvey, prisoners in Mountjoy Jail. That information signified that reprisal measures or death dealing reprisals were to be the new weapon of the Free State authorities in trying to overcome resistance to their rule and policy. Here was a new departure in the treatment of interned, untried prisoners. The report of the "reprisal" or "execution" came as a staggering blow to the men interned in Gormanston, not merely because of the sacrifice extracted but on account of the dire and irreplaceable loss of such prominent and stalwart champions of our Republican cause. All these men were lamented; some like Rory and Liam, particularly so,

because they were more in the public eye and very widely known in the political national and military circles prior to and subsequent to Easter Week, 1916. Because of that their names and their fame were coupled with the other two: Rory and Liam, Dick and Joe.

The manner and mode of the "executions", the day (Our Lady's Feast day, 8th December, 1922) selected for the slaying, the reprisals; the reason advanced for them could have but one meaning for incarcerated men; They betokened a new departure in the policy of the Free State authorities towards prisoners - any of the prisoners they choose to put out of the way. Men even said it might be anyone's turn tomorrow the next day or sometimes in the near or distant future. But most of our men viewed the reprisals in the light of an attempt to create terror and fear amongst us prisoners and non prisoners alike; in the full realisation of the bitter agony we felt for the loss of such noble and patriotic men, our men whom we honoured as martyrs for our cause. Yet, in our moments of sorrow and utter desolation we could not forbear to reflect on the changed times that had overtaken us and how with every succeeding day and week and month since the first shot was fired six months previously, sacrifices were being made valiantly and willingly offered by our comrades whether leaders or rank-and-filers that would have been regarded as collosal during the more recent Anglo-Irish war. The latest blood sacrifice, however, bore no similarity to and was not precedented by any previous one in detail in principle, cause or course, adopted by a former alien authority. That an Irish Government or a Government claiming to be Irish should have deigned to extract sacrifice by way of reprisal on untried prisoners in custody for several months, provided little

relief to us, who were interned, and at their mercy, and if we judged rightly would incense the men of the I.R.A. outside in the stiffening fight that they were making.

Christmas arrived - our first Christmas under the New Free State - An Saorstat Eireann, - regime. Christmas, and we prisoners according to the "will of the people"? Christmas, what did it mean to us? What could it mean to us? That festive season found us inside barbed wires. There were some little relaxations or modifications in the regulations for the day. We had, of course, to make our own preparations for spending our Christmas away from home. These were simple and few. Our dependence on the food parcels from our people outside to make our Christmas a happy and a merry one was very keenly felt and added to the burden which many of us realised was indeed hard enough to bear. Already our own relatives had suffered enormously by our six months internment by the loss of our salaries or wages. Few were the complaints from them on that score. We had reason to marvel how our people continued to subsist in such pecuniary circumstances and such severe straits. Yet inspite of the suffering and losses inflicted on them they bore them with wonderful steadfast courage and in a fine generous spirit, bearing with us in the ordeal which they and we faced, each in our different capacities in the full light that whatever the trial or the sacrifice a bold front had to be shown in the situation that then existed.

This matter of dependence on the goodness and generosity of our people outside caused many of the internees grave anxiety and serious apprehension. Some, who were normally better placed and in comparatively easy

circumstances had, perhaps, little cause for such anxiety or to feel gloomy on the question of want or stringency amongst their relatives. Happy the lot of the internee who was not worried over the financial affairs of home. Such people were, however, in a small minority. The great majority of us had reason to fear that our dependants were not living in the lap of luxury and if as so often happened, too frequently and too regularly, they sent us food, dainties, tobacco and cigarettes we knew that it was costing them more than they could afford and causing not merely an effort but a financial strain and was in excess of what we wished. The humblest parcel was a God sent gift. One has to be an internee to realise the importance and the value of such parcels. However good and plentiful the food provided there were always little extras required to make up for certain deficiencies or other short comings in the rations supplied. The amount, apart from the quality of the food allocated to each prisoner was barely enough to keep one alive - it was so regulated as to provide just a minimum fare to prevent one from actually going completely hungry where one had an average appetite. But as is bound to happen in such places and amongst so many varied classes of people, what might be regarded as ample for one man might be merely a trifle to another. Appetites like human structures vary.

It was not uncommon then, as it was not unreasonable, to perceive that quite a number of men were insufficiently and inadequately fed and nourished. Many of those and particularly men from the country could easily consume twice over the amount provided. It was a sad sight to see some of these sitting down to the what to them, were frugal meals and to hear them asking rather dolefully "Is that all". The <u>that</u> in the case

was so emphatically and so demonstratively expressed and signified more than even the words themselves. One could almost imagine that the question rather related to the matter of a purchase or a bet. There was too, a suggestion in the query that the men involved were thinking and bound to think in the presence of such a moiety of food, that they were being fooled into the assumption that the profered fare would or could sustain them. One look at some of these men, who normally could consume the three rations at one meal and still feel unsatisfied, afforded convincing proof of the terrible straits in which they found themselves in a situation where demand exceeded supply.

Hunger is good sauce, it is said. Ask any countryman or a townsman with the ordinary appetite of a countryman who has spent time in an internment camp, his version of the wisdom or unwisdom of the proverb and what answer do you think will be forthcoming. Invariably the majority would unanimously affirm and furnish absolute confirmation of its very potent relativity within its own compass or strata or bearing on the inner man, in its regard for the things that sustain life. But our men would have been more liable to answer: "Give us the sauce everytime and always - you can leave the hunger aside. We had enough of the latter during our internment".

It was a pitiful sight, a cruel and unpleasant sight to behold some of these men during mealtimes partaking of the food, knowing only too well that they were still unsatisfied and unfed. Fortunately the Dublin men, our own generous hearted men of the Dublin Brigade helped their country comrades in many ways. In many cases they provided the countrymen with some of their

rations and shared the contents of their food parcels, cigarettes and tobacco. We Dubliners although some of us were not much or even better off in worldly goods or wealth than they, seemed to get more parcels from home. Perhaps that was due to our being nearer to the supply base or that our folks were more alert or kindly than theirs. Whatever the reason it was hard to hazard but as already mentioned our parcels ~~our parcels~~ arrived more frequently and regularly. In the case of our country friends such parcels arrived once in a while. In every instance the amount of food etc. that they received in that way far exceeded ours. Then they would have feastings galore for a short spell supplementing the rations supplied by the camp authorities. The average Dublin man generally received one parcel per week, sometimes more, according to the generosity of his acquaintances. Generally in a spirit of independence the lucky recipient of the happy hoard would not dine in the ordinary mess hall, preferring rather to "live on his own keep" and by so doing leaving extra rations for the less fortunate "boarders". Hence the men of the bigger appetites benefited to the extent of having additional food, served at the table so discreetly vacated by the Dublin man.

Then, again, many of the Dublin men had formed themselves into groups, pooled their resources and lived a kind of community life within their respective huts and in the dining hall. It frequently happened that these groups refrained from partaking of the tea ration on such occasions when the supply of food from home was plentiful. In such cases we might obtain boiling water from the cook house, brew our own tea and have an alfresco tea in our own hut. On other occasions only draw the tea and forfeit the bread ration because we would have daintier food at our service. That was so, particularly

in regard to our group. Paul Brady was our Group Leader and General Manager in charge of the food supply position. He had a big job looking after our parcels. All the eatables were passed to him, the cigarettes and noneatables being retained by the respective individuals. A community spirit prevailed in respect to "smokes" which were always shared. It did not happen that fortune favoured us every day as generally most of us got our parcels on the same day, the exception being one of our men whose parcels came from the country. If it had not been for Paul's good management we would have made savages of ourselves by eating the food as received. No housewife could have served us better, especially within the bounds of rationing for he kept a watchful eye on us and of course on our parcels and saw that nothing would go astray and proper use made of everything. His was an unenviable job but he was able for it and liked it. We in turn liked him into the bargain for not alone was he trustworthy but he was downright honest and most attentive to us with a solicitude and a care that any housekeeper would envy. "Paul" one of our group would ask, "Whats on the menue today" For answer Paul would reply "I dont think we should draw any rations at Dinnertime" or. "We wont draw the rations this evening". "Good old Paul" or "Leave it to Paul" were often heard in praise of his good work. Then coming near the time for the respective meal he would prepare the food, some of us helping him. There was always someone to make the journey to the cookhouse for boiling water or to the diningroom for part of the rations when required. We were assured of a good meal.

"Brave Paul, you're a treat. You'll get a job in the Gresham after this", somebody would enthusiastically declare. We often wondered how he managed it, how he managed us, his very hungry but not extremely rude "family"

of eleven. We could write very fulsome of Paul and the tasty meals and dainties he prepared. He was adept and resourceful in the matter referred to. Many a time we looked on in wonder and amazement at his handiwork but more especially so in connection with his own individual characteristics for he was a combination of coolness, gentleness and kindness. I particularly have reason to praise him as during the period I was on the medically unfit list and in consequence excused parades etc. Unable to partake of some of the heavy camp food, the deficiency was made up in some other way. Paul saw to it that suitable necessaries when available were supplied to me. A supply of fresh eggs sent me by one of my friends, Jack Richmond, or sent in to others of the group were taken over by Paul, for my daily consumption. Other delicacies were similarly credited to me. It did not matter in the least who owned them. None of the group ever questioned Paul in such or any of his work. All were very agreeable, trusting him in disposing of the food as he thought fit and proper. Any of the men could have enjoyed these delicacies equally as well as your humble servant. No man could boast of better partners or nobler comrades. We came together as a group there we continued as a group, an almost human family. How often did I express regret for depriving the men of their precious luxuries. My remonstrances met no other reward than a continuation of that grand and kind service. How very typical this was of men like Paul Brady and the other men of the Hughes Garrison. Other men also on the sick list were assisted by their fellows.

Our little group had by then assumed a fair degree of importance in Camp affairs. Captain Gerry Golden was Hut Leader, Martin Finn the Camp Prison Medical Officer, Lieutenant Paddy Kirk was Camp Police Officer assisted by, among others, Larry O'Connor and Bertie Somerville and

Thomas Hahesy was attached to the Camp Post Office under Frank Scott. A synopsis of the work falling under each of these spheres of activities may not be remiss. The p position of our M.O. was a most onerous and essential one. He was responsible for looking after the health of his fellow internees, dispensing medicines, visiting the sick and the ailing and arranging the transfer of the seriously sick to the Camp hospital. Everyday he prepared a list of patients for the visiting and attention of the Free State Doctor; always he seemed to be kept going in the hundred and one duties associated with his office. He was supplied with stock medical "preparations" - pills, liquid paraffin iodine and a few other odds and ends. One might have a headache or a tummy complaint. He was given a Number Nine or the paraffin. Indeed the Number Nine was regarded as the magical cure-all. The M.O. too, proved himself to he a regular benefactor, an almost wonder worker. Few could have been so zealous, enthusiastic and serviceable as he. A proof of this was that he was held in great esteem among all classes. Those of us, and particularly, my humble self, who knew his worth and his capabilities only too well would not expect any but the best service, consideration,and attention from him. How bitterly he fought against that promotion and stoutly riled me for suggesting his name for the post. He advanced sound enough reasons against the course. Not that he did not wish or refused to kelp his fellows in that way; his dislike sprang frun causes that were purely medical; co-relating to the consciousness of being unable to render effective service under conditions that were none too satisfactory spacious or generous to permit of the free exercise of authority and the full right to administer to the corporal needs of the prisoners. His main objection centred round the point that he was being arbitrarily taken away

from contacts with his more intimate comrades with whom he had a common role to play and in so sharing their common lot in the ordinary life of the Camp. When however these matters were "ironed out" composed and finally settled, our M.O. by sheer force of character and a keen sense of duty rendered satisfactory service, giving proof thereby that he was the right man in the right place.

The police force strange as it may seem was an important necessary body. It fulfilled many useful functions and carried out manifold duties, such as guarding the stores, cookhouse, washhouses, dining halls, post office etc. as well as providing for the maintenance of good order in the Camp. Even in the best regulated and most orderly internment Camp such duties and perhaps such a force as this one was had to be undertaken and carried out. Discipline played a major part in its daily life, without which good order, proper management and sound government would have been ineffectual in maintaining the espirit de corps among the interned. Hence the very real necessity for such an institution as the police force, whose special function it was to preserve peaceable and orderly conditions in the camp. Although much of the duties attaching to that body came under the heading of protection for foodstuffs, clothing and other necessities it must not be presupposed that the men interned were thieves or rogues to any great extent; the measures were actually devised more by way of precautions, prevention being regarded as the best cure in such circumstances, and it is to the credit of the men as a whole that very little serious trouble arose and only a few cases of petty larceny were reported to engage the attention or intervention of the Camp Police against delinquents or delinquents amongst the men. Except once when what appeared to be a clash between a group of men and our Camp authorities

was intervention by our police force called for. In that instance the delinquents were regarded as being insubordinate by refusing to perform certain work essential camp work. Their action in that regard earned them certain punishment and some of them "the clink" then in use for the first time. That was indeed as strong measure to take, but it was hinted at the time that an alternative choice was to hand them over to the Free State authorities, a course that did not commend itself to our Camp Staff, who felt themselves alone capable of maintaining orderly conditions instead of having the camp run by the former. The choice was not, however a happy or a pleasant one but it left us freer and more peaceable than had the matter been taken in hand by the Staters who in all probability would have exploited the position, caused greater friction amongst us and substituted harsher methods than any that could be utilised by our authorities. Thanks to the good sense and superb discipline of the vast majority of the men the spirit of revolt or whatever it was terminated in a few days and we were enabled to continue living our own way within the framework of our camp administration. The incident referred to left very few scars. If anything it improved the relationship between the Camp Staff and the men generally.

On the whole our Camp Police behaved well and performed wonderful work. Day in and day out in all weathers and in every circumstance they constantly consistently and unremittingly served. We could not fail to be impressed by their work. Nay, we had many reasons to feel grateful for having such a fine body of men, who though hailing from various parts of Ireland were one in thought and in service to and for the men interned. Theirs

was not the most minor service in the routine and administration of the Camp.

The Post Office also could lay claim to be an important service in Camp affairs. Three of the mainstays of that institution were Frank Scott and his assistants Thomas Hohesy and a man named Tierney. The latter was a student of St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra. Part of their duties consisted of looking after the prisoners letters and parcels. The incoming letters and parcels addressed to the prisoners after going through the censoring process were passed on to them, who in turn arranged and supervised delivery to the prisoners. The men were loud in their praise of these men, who were courteous, painstaking and untiring in their particular sphere. That indeed was service with a capital "S". There was a good amount of hard solid work attached to that branch which at times resembled a sub-post office outside and it is satisfactory to note that the arrangements worked very well. The only occasions where failure might be recorded or when their services were not in strict demand were during periods when letters and parcels were stopped by the Free State authorities as a reprisal for our deeds or misdeeds of some of our members in attempting or securing escape from bondage.

Which brings us to interesting subjects. These reprisals occurred on several occasions. One arose after it was discovered that some of the internees had successfully escaped. The discovery was made in a very startling and dramatic way. A rumour spread through the Camp that somewhere in the country - Wexford was hinted as the actual scene - the Free State soldiers surrounded a house to arrest suspected soldiers of the I.R.A. These refused to surrender and in the course of the ensuing

fighting were killed. It transpired later that they were men who should then have been internees in Gormanston and were actually listed as prisoners there. How and when they escaped were questions that baffled the intelligence of the Free State authorities. Here was a real number one mystery - to escape and not leave traces of the fact. However by the time investigation was set in motion and the actual escape discovered the scene had shifted to Gormanston Camp. So one evening we paraded in our respective huts and as was customary were counted.

One would have been an absolute fool not to appraise that there was something in the air as if foreboding anxiety and possible trouble; the Free State officers showed traces of evident excitement and worry wryness and sourness stamped on their faces as they moved through the huts "making the count". We could not fail to notice also that they were unusually attentive and slower in carrying out that work. Suddenly the whisper passed round "a re-count - the count is short". Such it was! "Truth is stranger than fiction". Excitement rang very high. The re-count revealed that a number of men were missing. Meanwhile preventative orders had been issued, armed guards being placed at the various hut entrances.

We were uncommonly long detained, confined to our huts as re-count followed re-count, each registering a loss in potential membership of the camp. A further whisper went the rounds. Six or seven men missing! Can we believe our ears - Six or seven men? Needless to remark that news caused us to be excited, madly excited. Many of the men could not hold themselves in check. They gave full play to their emotions. "Hope they (the lucky escapees) got safely away" could be heard on all sides. "Who were they anyway? When and how did they escape?" were questions that sprang from the lips of many an internee there.

It was a long time afterwards when the order to "Dismiss" was given. Then "Dame Rumour" unleashed the many have-it-on-the-best-of-authority sources of information, anent the escapes and the escapees. Who were they? Many names were mentioned. Some were important. Some less so. Could it be Tom? Could it be Dick? Could it be Harry? "So and so in such a hut is one of them - he escaped a week or so ago". "Do you know so and so? Well he escaped too. Please don't ask when he went - it certainly was not yesterday or the day before. He must have gone a long time ago." Of course there were a lot of wild yarns spun, too. Some of them were outlandish and equally foolish concerning how Billy X or Tommy Z escaped, that would put a magician to shame or make him green with anger and envy. Would that all of us could come under the magic spell and conjure our way through the barbed wires or whatever form the escapees took to the roads beyond the Camp.

Now that the "cat was out of the bag" and the discovery was made that some of the internees had stolen a march on their captors, departing thereby into space, nothing would be lost by recording the actual method of escape. Plainly it was quite simple and/extremely an hazardous task. Every day, every fine day the internees were conducted to the recreation field then situated about two or three hundred yards away from the Camp proper and in close proximity to the aeroplane hangars. Ample armed guards were provided on the march and around the field in question. During the period of recreation the prisoners indulged in foothall and other games and forms of exercise. There was nothing very extrarodinary or mysterious about these things - not to the ordinary or average man and certainly not to those whose task it was to guard them. Yet that same field was the seat

of operation, where the drama was enacted. How? By cutting through or boring under the barbed wire which surrounded the field? No! By means of a tunnel into which men would enter and come out at the other side? Emphatically no! It was hardly likely that a tunnel could be prepared under such circumstances and in the short space of time allotted for recreation there, not to mention the utilisation and availability of materials for digging etc. Besides - well we had better disregard the tunnel idea instanter as also the question of walking away without being seen and captured.

The plan of escape was relatively easy even comical. A few men would sit themselves in a certain place in the recreation field in which there was a small runt or depression in the ground. One of their number the person projecting escape, would lie in that spot and the other men plucking baldes of grass would heap these upon him. In that way the man was covered or buried, the work being finished before the rest of the prisoners re-assembled and were returned to the Camp. Then the individual "left" behind lay low, hugging the ground and remained quiet and dormant until dark of night, when, selecting the best moment for the "dash" to liberty he crawled to a selected spot in the barbed wire defences, the first barrier to be negotiated. Actually that obstacle was not the most difficult one even if it was the most important, for even that point was well within damger zone being within the boundaries of the military establishments and Free State garrison quarters. A worse obstacle or difficulty was the menace of a huge searchlight that was continually in use during nighttime. The escapee faced with that menace had to time his "dashes" and spurts during dark spells, when the search

light was not playing in his vicinity, lying deep into mother earth when it did. That must have been a tedious and trying ordeal which had to continue, all going well, for quite a considerable period of time and distance from the camp environs, possibly for hours and when he was some miles away, so powerful and searching were the rays and the vast area that was covered by that immense brilliant searchlight. Having cleared the vicinity of the camp the escapee had to traverse across country, avoiding roads and habitations as far as possible. Luck and caution engendered a fair prospect of success to the escapee.

Actually as we learned, many men did escape in that way and not alone that but were able to show up in far distant parts of the country linking up and fighting with I.R.A. units. Men undertaking such a media for their own liberation required to be in full possession of their faculties, grit and more than ordinary resourcefulness to gain their object. Almost everything was against the escapee from the first moment of his "lying in wait" until he reached the point many miles away when he could breathe freely and say "I am a free man again". Privations and hardships had also to be encountered and wrestled with, for the spaceof days or weeks according to the distance traversed. If his destin tion was Dublin he had to travel 22 miles - we had better not conjecture too much as to the ways and means of getting there or anywhere else, Suffice it to say that he was hardly likely to obtain friendly help or transport in so doing unless prior knowledge of his dash was already available and he were among his own immediate friends and confreres.

It can be fairly appreciated that only a very few of the prisoners were sufficiently "in the know" and

and cogniscant of that method of escape. Those that were trusted with and carried out the secret kept their tongues in their cheeks, their minds to themselves. There was never any indication that the Free State authorities had the slightest inkling that the men escaped in that peculiar way - from the recreation field - they would hardly believe it possible. They were more inclined to believe that the escapes occurred through a tunnel or other medium within the camp proper. Indeed, according to comments on the question the latter course was deemed the most feasible and imaginable one.

Next to the actual method of escape the cloaking or covering up of the count was indeed a mystery. That contrivance gave the men time to cover a fair amount of space. Possibly it might have continued indefinitely had not that sad affair in Wexford awakened the Free State authorities to the fact that men had escaped from the Camp. How, indeed, was the count cloaked? By the greatest piece of bluff and roguery imaginable. Many weeks had elapsed since the first man escaped, many days since the last man. The counting morning and evening was awways "correct". Each occasion the counting officers, consisting of a Free Stater and one of our Officers paced the huts first on one side, then on the other, counting as they went. As they passed by along one side one or more of the prisoners already counted "switched over" to the other side. Great care and timing were needed to effect that swift movement, to permit the "cover-ups" to be in position in the new alignment before the counting officers arrived there. In that way the count was "correct".

But when it became known that the Staters had information of a kind that some of the prisoners had escaped the incongruity of keeping up the bluff of

of "covering up" manifested itself with the result that they secured the correct count, minus the loss of a good many former prisoners. For their (the latters) pains and their achievements we the unescaping ones were accordingly punished. Our parcels and letters were summarily stopped and we ceased to exist as far as the outside world was concerned. Poor us! Anyway we got our thrill or series of thrills out of the whole proceedings. We could not be otherwise than envious of the successful ones. Good luck to the surviving ones who were braving everything and fighting for our cause, free and fighting for freedom while we bore the lesser inconvenience and endured the minor hardships which a stoppage of letters and parcels connoted, the loss of many precious smokes of dainty luxuries and dishes, of which the former were the more greviously missed and felt. Our joy, however, was unbounded even though only a few men had escaped and whatever grumbles were uttered seemed to be more directed against those who imposed those hardships than against the men who had escaped. Strange we thought how the interning authorities reacted to such situations and worked in such predicaments, when men like Tom Barry of Cork Brigade, Martin Hogan of 1st Battalion, Dublin Brigade and others escaped.

Another reprisal which caused a stoppage of letters and parcels to be enforced against us was when a tunnel was discovered but no escapes were registered on that occasion. That did not spare us from having to do without our fags. Lady Nicotine surely mocked us again. As a result the camp was again reduced to a perfectly smokeless and an almost truly comfortless nothingness consequent on the enforced non-indulgence of the "noxious week" to which we were formerly, however irregularly, addicts and aspirants. How we raved over our losses in that regard but had any of

our men really escaped little complaint would have been uttered on account of burden and deprivations so universally applied as punishment to be borne in the spirit of adventure and on behalf of the cause.

There were other occasions when excitement came to our camp in Gormanston. Some such emanated not from the prisoners themselves or in our caged encampment but rather arose from the numerous "shoots up" that occurred and alarms that were raised from time to time, principally in the nightime. We heard that the causes for most of these were due to the activity of Frank Aiken and his men of the Louth Brigade Column. These, we were informed were active within the area of the Camp around Balbriggan etc. The name "Aiken" seemed to have a quite electirifying effect on the Free State garrison in Gormanstown, judging by their activity and their shootings. Sometimes it gave us the impression that Aiken and his men were attacking the post; at other times the sound of shooting in the distance resembled pitched battles. How often were we keyed up to expectation of his actual descent on the Camp to set us free and thus repeat the leave-taking of the prisoners in Dundalk jail of which it was said he was leader and liberator. We could not, of course, imagine that all the shooting indulged in on such occasions were due to nerves or to panic on the part of the Gormanston Garrison, or to keep them in trim and in right good soldierly spirit. How could we know the true position? After all there might have been some truth in the stories that circulated. There could even be some point in Aiken moving in our direction at that time. Would he come to our rescue after all? The question was much debated by the prisoners - indeed wished for. Optimism ran high at times and men could be heard

to exclaim during a period of intense shooting "Come along Frankie, we are waiting for you to get us out of here."

How often, had we been awakened by the firing outside! How often,lying awake in bed did we become conscious of such a move to set us free, every shot, or volley of shots, the audible movements of men and lorries of the garrison about us accentuating the long wished for liberation by such a means. On such occasions we watched the play of the search lights as they flashed their brilliant rays and beams round about here, there and yonder, illuminating various spots in the landscape and throwing lurid reflections on land marks and objects in the vicinity - one time flashing on points immediately convenient within or near our own camp; at other times spreading its rays to distant places, roads etc. alternating their movements from one point to another, backwards, forwards and sideways. On less auspicious occasion that sight would have been nice to behold - the fairylike illuminated exhibition so similar at times, so brilliant, beautiful and awe inspiring. In normal times and in a more peaceful atmosphere and congenial environment one could admire it, be enchanted by the spectacle and be spellbound thereby. But as prisoners then, we could only look at the sight and wonder! What devilment was behind it all.

During all of those performances "Frankie" came not, despite the cravings of many an internment weary I.R.A. man. He never seemed to come to such close quarters, although we heard tales of him and his men attacking a post some little distance from the Camp or further away at or near Balbriggan.

April 1923 came and with it "cease fire Order" issued by De Valera. That was stunning, startling and extraordinary news to the internees of Gormanstown Camp. We could hardly imagine it and found it hard to believe that the fighting men outside were so completely beaten as to cause them to give up the fight. Opinions differed as to the wisdom or otherwise of the Order. "Why should our men, the soldiers of the I.R.A. capitulate now after the great fight they had so nobly so bravely waged? Were we beaten?" We found little solace in the question which that "Cease Fire Order" impelled. Yet, the tone of the order seemed to indicate that the active fighting was at an end. But why?

Some of our men favoured De Valera's Order, or rather the Order as issued by him. Others did not. Many favoured it, believeing that De Valera acted for the Army. We had no proof that he did not, indeed there was no sound or practical reason to suppose otherwise. He must have had the support of and shared the confidence of authorities when he issued that order. But the question which most of our men debated was "what was behind the move?"

Quite a considerable number of the witnesses viewed the matter in the nature of a "rift in the lute". Another and possibly a more serious schism inhibited into I.R.A. affairs. There was no visible evidence to support such a thesis were cognisance to be taken of certain relevant facts in the military sphere outside which seemed to suggest that the I.R.A. had been going through anxious and difficult time of late, fighting under most trying and harrowing conditions. Some such news had crept into the camp from outside, given by men who

given by men who had been in the fighting up to a short time previously or by secret means. A lot of that news was neither agreeable or encouraging. Little of it gave hope or promise of victory by force of arms. Much of it suggested alone the possibility of "sticking it out", implying a process of attrition, resistance to the last breath and the last shot. As internees we had no choice in any of the courses suggested or proclaimed beyond sticking it out, of remaining put where we unfortunately were likely to be for quite a time to come. But the men outside had, we appraised, the bigger problem, as suggested by that recent order bringing a cessation to the fighting.

"The men fighting outside are wonderful" we heard many a new internee declare. Wonderful they were in standing up bravely and well to the strain and ordeal of the fight; wonderful in their valour in their service, in their sacrifices, though many heavy hands were laid on them, turned against them, thrust against them. We had lost some great men: Liam Lynch had died fighting. Harry Boland was gone, Noel Lemass, Martin Hogan was slain on the roadside, Peadar Breslin, Erskine Childers, Cathal Brugha. These were a few of the numerous heroic dead who typified our cause. Could it be that their sacrifices were in vain? Did they die for this? Was this the end they sought? Was it the end we sought? Could we not go one step further? Were all our hopes dashed to the ground now? Must we, at last cry "finis" to the task that men like these had sought to have fulfilled? If our cause and our fighting men were so badly beaten - what then?

Obviously we could not attempt an answer to these questions and the many other consequential questions that sprang readily to our lips, that seemed to strike us full in the face, to mock us, to upbraid us, and to haunt us.

It was difficult to grasp the full signifance of that cessation of hostilities Order, However we viewed it however we debated it. Perhaps we were too far removed from the actual scene of operation as it might be called, to form a right or proper opinion on it. Some of us had been so long isolated, so long hors-de-combat and out of regular intimate contact with the fighting men and of the events of the fighting up to date as to impose an undue strain on our imaginations, as to unduly effect our outlook or stultify our sense of complete understanding of a matter of such delicate and momentuous importance. Few of us could straight-away declare nay or yea to the proposition as to whether it was right to cease fighting; few could or would say that it was wrong to decide the question when full and detailed information was unavailable from the outside world - concerning the real opinions of the fighting men particularly on the course contemplated. Undoubtedly the matter was a big and serious one; it raised a big issue in the military affairs of the I.R.A. present and future.

As some of us viewed the position, the fight had come to an end. It possibly meant an end, also to our efforts to prevent by physical means the establishment of the Treaty. That was, if anything, a bitter pill to swallow, signalling as it did our elimination as a fighting force, potentially eclipsed by the forces arrayed against us, the victors of the contest. The wise ones or those who made profession to wisdom likened our efforts to one of protest, declaring forsooth "that we had made our effective protest". Effective protest, indeed!. As if a protest without victory could be termed effective or satisfactory. We did not succeed, despite our great losses in human blood, the heavy toll of sacrifices as

as represented by those "killed in action", those slain on the roadside and those otherwise officially hanged. No account could be given of the tears that were shed or the sweat that was extracted in or by the resistance offered by the I.R.A. No, we protested and we failed. Which raised many other questions, the most appropriate one being - were we worse or better by protesting in fighting and then voluntarily ceasing fire.

Worse, some said - we lit a torch that was meant to light the way to freedom - we blazed the trail and fought the good fight that was intended to extricate the country from a surrender of sovereign rights, alas, only to fall deeper into the quagmire of defeat of humiliation and despondency. Defeated we were. Could worse befall us? Was it possible that there was no other solution to the problem of discontinuance of a fight so gallantly made or any reason why we should not be angered, bewildered and crushed down with the weight of that deadly blow?

It would be only natural; It would have been only human if the internees in Gormanston then responded in favour of the "cease fire order". Perhaps their best personal and individual interests lay in supporting the idea as it would eventually open the camp gates, thereby liberating them and given them the chance of returning to their homes and normal associations. Some of the men had given the best years of their young lives in suffering, in fighting, in imprisonment or in internment. Most of them after all this could do with a good, great and reasonable period of rest and rehabilitation, presuming such was possible in the new Free State order of things. There were many sound reasons to advance in favour of that attitude and frame of mind. Just as there were sound arguments to favour their desire, if

the actually succumbed to the desire, to put home and hearth before everything else. We might out of disgust at the way things had shaped out and of apprehension for the future consider that in our own interests the best course to pursue should be to look to ourselves and after our own household affairs. There then did not appear to be any possibility for our forces to carry on in the face of this set back and seeming practical defeat. There was an almost tragic note of apprehension, a feeling of despair and dismay manifested by some of the men, who felt chagrinned for being led so far only to be let down too abruptly and too easily. Perhaps our views on current events were faulty. Perhaps we lacked vision or were wayward in imagination. Perhaps we had not a keen sense of realisation that our forces - the I.R.A. outside - had been irreparably weakened but not destroyed; all of which could be understandable when consideration is given to the fact of our being so long out of touch with them and from a world that differed from our own. Perhaps the period of our confinement as interned prisoners had made us cynical, doubtful or pessimistic of our relative capacity to win, or too optimistic of our values or of our power to admit of defeat in any circumstances whatsoever. Perhaps our vision was distorted by the use of coloured glasses, and we failed to look facts full in the face that the only people who had any right to decide policy were they who had been in the fighting up to date. These things were all permissible and possible and yet other things being equal, we had no choice in such a matter, because whatever we said or did or thought could not change our status as prisoners unless a change of heart came to those who interned us and because only the fighting men of the I.R.A. could decide what was possible and what was impossible of achievement.

We had, therefore, no other option as comrades of the fighting men but to acquiesce in and to submit to their judgment and their decisions. No other course was logical, none other was feasible or of greater importance. There was also no use in being ultra sentimental about it either. We had to face a very bitter and cold fact. No fanciful words, no pompous assertions no high faluting talk could disguise the fact that we were utterly frustrated, militarily beaten. Taken all in all it was a serious and it was to be assumed a sad course for a man like De Valera to take - to as it were admit defeat and to admit it in a way as to suggest that we could not continue fighting as a military force indefinitely, considering numbers, losses and other things of which he and those who were on the spot were cognisant. One could go further than that and returning to the earlier reference to the matter, repeat that verily we had made our protest.

But not all men, least of all not all men incarcerated in an internment camp and at such a time could willy-nilly agree unanimously that the course submitted was the right one. Hence it was not unreasonable to expect and anticipate a divergence of opinion on the question raised by De Valera's issuing of the "cease fire order" or to be more precise our I.R.A. Army "cease fire order", which De Valera, at their direction issued. It perforce received a mixed reception prior to its being regarded as an authentic order. Since it was proved to be so and established beyond doubt it found perhaps less support among the vast numbers of internees. Were a vital matter like this to depend on the decision of the internees judgment would have been given to carry on the fight, and be it said to their credit, many would have preferred to rot there than to show any weakness

or indicate defeatist attitude. But all appreciated that the men outside were the best judges of the situation and rightly so, since they were the most affected as they were the most concerned in general policy. How many times did we hear during the course of arguments and debates men declare "Surely the fighting men outside must know what they are doing. Leave it to them - they're the people that really matter as they are the best judges."

We had no choice, apparently but to "take it in the stride" in the soldiers way - obey first and obey always. Whatever other faults could be registered against individuals the vast majority of the prisoners were not lacking in soldierly qualities, both in regard to the active participation in the fight and their then disciplinary conduct during internment. In the latter connection cognisance must be taken of their refusal to avail of opportunities to be released by disreputable means by signing a form which stipulated that the signee would undertake and promise not to take up arms against the State. That refusal alone closed the door against their liberation and automatically branded them as being unrepentant of their former military actions. There were also other ways in which they proved their fidelity to the I.R.A. cause; tempting and embarrassing ways enough of which mention may have to be made later, and though the average man among the hundreds of men interned in Gormanston could and did rail, rave and growl - which after all could not be quite regarded as unsoldierly or unsoliderly conduct - they were true and sound on the things that really mattered. Whatever our criticisms of or arguments for or against the "cease fire order" there were very few amongst us who did not feel and express sorrow for the fighting men outside who had borne the brunt of the conflict and fought well, thus earning our pride

our admiration and our respect to which they were justly entitled.

Whatever effect that "cease fire order" had on people and life outside one fact emerged, and that was, it did not change our status as internees, nor did it bring about our early release, contrary to the conjectures and in some cases, beliefs, of quite a few people, who argued that the cessation of fighting assured the point in that respect. It might have been so consumated were there no fly in the ointment. The "cease fire order" apparently aimed at ending active fighting - it specifically and in addition, stipulated that the arms were to be dumped. The Free State Authorities wanted along with the "cease fire" the I.R.A. to surrender their arms. That's where the real crux arose, because the I.R.A. refused such a demand, as compliance with it would have been tantamount to a general surrender and complete capitulation. Consequently the situation was exploited to the full and it looked as if we would be held captive for some future time. So, said we, better to settle down again for a further period of internment.

We accordingly went on as before, looking forward to approaching summer. Even so, there were internees, many or few, who more optimistic than others dreamt sweet dreams of release and planned for it. That planning took several forms such as attention to the minutest detail and small things associated with personal hygiene and personal property, the securing and manufacture of suit cases or holdalls for their goods and chattels; all kinds of self-help and self mindedness, so necessary in order that they would not be caught napping when the release order reached them. But not all the internees were so industrious; not all were so optimistic of release.

The tone of the news available to us suggested that nothing in the nature of a general release was contemplated.

Chapter 31.

Days, weeks and months passed, bringing a virtual termination to summer. Meanwhile a slight trickle of releasees began to flow from the camp. Was it a trick devised to delude us into the belief of a break up of the camp? To make matters more perplexing some particularly reputable men were released at that stage. We saw them passing down the road outside the Camp proper. Even the hint went around that those released "had signed the form" then looked upon as a detestable repugnant and treacherous act. Exceptions may have been made, or perhaps understandable in certain specific cases where the person concerned in its signing was not an established I.R.A. man or had been arrested on suspicion of being, or rendering help as such. Some men of these categories had refused to subscribe to or sign the obnoxious form for any reason whatever. There were even men who for most urgent causes such as on occasions of family distress, affliction or bereavement would not accept parole if by so doing they had to submit to such conditions. They could, had they chose, have done so secretly and without creating the suspicion of other prisoners. Indeed at the time many broad hints were made and many rumours set in circulation alleging that a number of men had already signed, all of which or part of which may have been true, but such was not the general character, and did not refer to the vast majority of prisoners, who most emphatically "stuck it out" as a matter of principle.

At that particular time, also, the interning authorities did not exhibit any symptom of releasing on a large scale. Hence the men who did not sign were as near to release as those who were alleged to have signed it. Not

alone that but a few months after the issuing of the "cease fire order" say in September or October, affairs in the Camp took a new turn when the prisoners decided to "go on hunger strike" in order to force their release. Already the I.R.A. prisoners in Mountjoy Prison and in other places of incarceration had embarked on that course. It came about in this way. One day we were called to a meeting in the dining room, which was packed to capacity. There we were informed of the general policy as adopted by the other prisoners in the places named. After a prolonged discussion the general body of the prisoners unanimously approved of the strike. That was a vital and far-reaching decision to make, and one which was bound to have repercussions. The organisation, administration and general routine of the camp, with one exception, was effected. Certain men were excused participation in the strike, such as men who were sick, feeble or otherwise medically unfit. Special men were selected to form an emergency camp staff and medical service with a few to look after cookhouse and other duties. Complete authority was given to our Prisoner Medical Officer for running the Camp. Most, if not all, of these men even the infirm and sick elected to go on strike. The idea behind the prohibition was that these men were to attend on the hunger strikers. They were actually allocated to that work in some cases forced to do so.

It was with great heart-burnings and against the grain and desires that many of these men consented to remain off the strike. These men, be it said to their credit and in their favour disliked that particular arrangement and in cases baulked against it, harangued and made trouble about it in order to stand or fall with their comrades. But the order stood. As far as I could perceive

few of these were more upset than our own M.O. He was beside himself in indignation and regret and sought every means to obtain a cancellation of the order in his specific case. But, no! The prisoners' staff would not relax in his favour. A similar story could be told in other cases Consequently the necleus of a Camp Staff under the M.O's authority was formed, with a number of men, of which the writer was one, assisted as helpers. The only alternative to that, or to our refusal to obey our orders would take over control of the camp and that would not have suited us and of which it would be better to avoid than to encourage.

Obviously we, the men who were restrained from going on hunger strike were, if anything, the most forlorn personalities in the camp. To make matters worse, for us, we were required to "carry on as usual" to accept "business as usual" as a definite policy in our mode of existence then. What stung us worse than the order excluding us was - we were permitted to partake of our ordinary rations and to receive food parcels. It required more than an order to being us to do these things. Many found it difficult to reconcile themselves to eating at all.

Eventually it was agreed by the men concerned to refuse to accept food parcels from their relations who were in turn advised not to despatch such but only cigarettes and other non-edible items. To say that it was a tussle and a hard enough thing to eat food at all under the circumstances would be a very mild statement indeed. In order to spare the feelings of the other men who were undergoing the hunger strike our group preferred to dine in one of the small rooms adjacent to the cookhouse, so secluded as to be away from sight and smell of them. God

knows it was an ordeal enough to eat and many a meal remained unconsumed or only slightly partaken of an actual repugnance of their position, because of the spectre then hanging over the camp. But better counsels prevailing, these men rose to the occasion which the special mission trust on them imposed.

Oh, the agony, the irony and the misery of our positions! We felt we had less consolation than our hunger-striking comrades. How much we envied them, wished we were sharing their lot, and engaging in the fight with them. Why should we have to suffer this way? - for it was suffering of a most acute kind, incomparable to that which the hunger-strikers were bearing. At one time we suffered in going to the dining room, or if going went there with little appetite to eat. The whole position was aggravating, distasteful, disgusting - trying to adapt ourselves to a thing that we had no heart in. Why should we have to force ourselves to eat. Why in short should we have to do anything that the hunger-strikers were not doing. Why should we of all people be excused? Why? Why? WHY??? For answer we had our special orders as issued by the Camp Council.

Thus it came about that better counsel prevailing the men exempt from the strike rose magnificently to the occasion which that particular mission entrusted to them and in reacting to which regard for the welfare of the hungerstrikers became most imperative and a very vital necessity. That absolute abandon required will-power and effort of no mean order, at a time when some of the men had deliberately cut or were not availing of their full rations as a kind of penance because "their comrades were on total food strike."

In striking and mixed contrast to us, our situation, and our problems the men on hunger-strike were apparently unworried, freer and happier in more senses than one. They as the first preparation for engaging in the strike, disposed of whatever food they possessed prior to the selected day for action. They, also, like us, acquainted their people outside not to send them food but enjoined them to send cigarettes only. They were not required to perform any camp duties or work, or to engage in any bodily strength or weaken themselves unduly. The main concern was to conserve their energy in order to make a big fight. In this particular instance the men came to know themselves as they were or as they appeared to be in the eyes of their fellows, gradually wasting away, for want of the things that supply nourishment to the "inner man". That was the serious aspect of the position, portraying as it truly did a circumstance that was pregnant with grave consequences for many if not all of those who were placed in that plight of refusing food. True the first few days mayhaps in a week's time many of these men would be unable to show much bodily activity - but this is travelling too far and too quick in the recording of the events.

Reason dictated that they should "take things" easy - that was the best course. It was better to do so in the early stages if one were to keep in the race for a prolonged fast. Logic and commonsense demanded that men should not unreasonably exert themselves. Many sound reasons could be advanced in favour of or practice of such simple rules of health. Had we the power to sermonise we might address such men thus: Hold on to life as long and as tenaciously as possible. Don't trifle with your much vaunted power of resistance or sense of endurance.

Enthusiasm and grit are necessary aids in the contest. They have helped you in the past and possibly swayed you in deciding that awful question of the hunger strike which to your way of thinking is not blameworthy but make them now serve you in a new and a more fruitful manner by making them subservient to your individual requirements and controlled by your natural facilities as well. Your mind, your body and your soul, in short, harmonise enthusiasm and grit with flesh and blood, bone and sinew and you will then be doubly armed for the conflict. Above all and transcending all be true to yourselves and give a good example to your comrades.

Plainly such a mode of sermonising if at all necessary, on the first day, was hardly appropriate or fitting on the second or succeeding days when the men concerned in the hunger strike had settled down and adapted themselves to the task of making a big fight. Already they were exercising sufficient care in conserving their energies their vitalities and bodily strength once the reactions which some of them felt after the gorging of food pre-strike had been neutralised by the absence of it afterwards.

Then too in the first few days of the strike the men who were exempt from the ordeal were properly organised and installed in their new sphere of activities. Well defined and definite duties were assigned individually and collectively. Every hut supplied its quota of men for the service of looking after the welfare of the men and when required attending to their wants by making of beds nursing etc. and in keeping the huts clean. The number of men for each hut varied from two upwards according to the number of occupants. One of the duties entailed that a good and ample water supply was to be always available, day and night. This had to be hot and was used for

drinking purposes. Thus there was brewed a new camp concoction - to wit soup!! Soup indeed!!! which was not soup at all, but nicknamed such by one of the strikers. Actually it was boiling water seasoned with pepper and salt. This was hardly the savory dish that one would lay "before the king" with due apologies to the rhyme. It was neither very fattening or ultra wholesome, on its own, at least, but it was quite a necessity under the circumstances then, according to medical standards, as it helped to keep the bodily system in some kind of working order, to minimise the harmful effects accruing from fasting.

The difficulty of having boiling water available day and night was aggravated by the insufficient full rations of coal issued. We had therefore to make up that deficiency by using all kinds of rubbish available, a stiff enough problem at any other time but then next to impossible to maintain. Neither mad dogs or growling internees could extract one ounce of additional coal from the interning authorities. Which brings me to a recital of a story which starts with the disappearance of a hut and finishes when its component parts became firing for hut fires. One of the four wooden huts situated near "L" hut had previously undergone the process of stripping and in consequence was looking the worst for time and useage combined. To make up leeway in the fuel supply some adventurous group of internees decided to hamstring a further portion of wood from the affected hut in order to add fuel to the fire and provide warmth to the "home from home". Procuring a rope they tightly fastened it to a section of the hut. Then by a bold tug-of-war effort annexed it by pulling and tugging at it as it sped across space, a distance of about 15 yards to a more secluded spot, the corner of "L" hut. All the the while they kept a "weather eye" on the sentry post situated close by. Such a move or movement could not,

however, escape the vigilant eyes of one, at least, of the sentries whose challenge "Halt. Who goes there", repeated several times bore a message as menacing as it was unwelcome at the time. He, no doubt, must have been puzzled and disturbed by what he saw or what he thought he saw in the darkness - that moving object which was neigher men nor beast, fish fowl or red herring! Who could blame him for his activities or his reactions at such a deceptive and uncertain moment when there was no earthly chance of registering sound reasoning or applying normal optical powers to solve what must have appeared to him to be a prime mystery. Perhaps he thought he was "seeing double" or suffering from a frustrated sense of imagination as he beheld that almost animated object moving as if by magic. Who could abuse him if he thought portion of mother earth was being unloosed disentangling itself from its anchorage and parting company therefrom rather than remain an integral complete whole. For such was the stealthy creeping movement of the timber pile that none but those who shared the secret of the trick which was being played could have formed any impression other than the right one. We could none the less make allowance for the challenges, oaths and expostulations of the sentry because of his dutiful regard for orders to keep us in our places, we being prisoners and he one of custodians. Were positions reversed we might have felt ourselves in a similar quandary and a similar frame of mind and imaginings - a prey and a victim to many strange notions, doubts and feelings on such a dark night and when the episode was over and things became normal, albeit when the moving object had been safely deposited to supplement the fuel ration we might - perhaps he did to - give a big sigh of relief and exclaim - Thank Goodness thats that.

To return to other affairs connected with the hunger strike and the men in attendance on the participants - We, the exempt men were required to give a twenty hour service, by a subdivision of attendance and labour. During daytime we received a certain amount of help from some of the hungerstrikers who were sufficiently strong and able to perform some of the minor tasks as keeping the water boiling and serving the nicknamed soup to the thirsty ones. In the night time we subdivided our duty between sleep and working hours, in order not to leave the men unattended. For the first week of the strike little trouble was experienced in fulfilling the several tasks but after that time when a number of men had taken to their beds due to exhaustion and weakness and more were expected to do so we entered on an almost full time service, to cope with which much more than ordinary will power was necessary to bring even the meagre succour solace and assistance at our command to the men concerned.

Night duty was the worst of our ordeals. It was uncanny, weird and singularly unpleasant to sit at the fire the one fire in the hut out of the four in the hut which could be kept going owing to fuel shortage - there to listen to the moanings and groanings of some of the men and to witness others as they tossed, turned and moved in their beds in troubled unsatisfying sleep or at other times being suddenly called to pay attention to one or more men, on request for drinks of water. Talk about being in a hospital ward. Ours was, facsimile, such a place then, the one outstanding difference being that our patients suffered from the one bodily ailment.

Some would dream, openly and aloud, much of it and indeed much of their dream talk and sleep "ramblings" concerned food, the lovely tasty and appetising meals they

sometimes had, thought they had or would like to have. Pity the poor souls, any of their comrades whose misfortune it was to be awake at such a recital. How such talk must have jarred their nerves and added to their other misery in not being able to sleep. "Give me a drink, please" was generally the most common utterance. Words which dug deep in your heart, impressed your mind and made you feel conscious of their very sad plight. " "Give me a drink please" repeated a score or more times during the night because as like the recital of a litany the very words were sufficient to draw tears to your eyes to sting you to the core in the full realisation of the awful pathos, the cruel drama and the immense tragedy which that hunger striking effort manifested. "A drink please" from the parched lips of one who was growing weaker with the passing of time conveyed a message that meant more than the words implied - the the owner of that voice was loosing his grip on life and moving slowly yet steadily on the ebb tide. "Drink" without the "please". Oh, what could one think, but that the poor mendicant was indeed sinking very low - so low as to require more earnest attention on our part to watch and ward over him or they as the case was. Alas! the agony, the suspense and the wonder of it all!

Thus our duties increased and thus the men participating in the food-fast, fought their individual battle against heavy odds. Every night the same scenes were enacted, the same requests were made. Water, Water and more water. Some, with the spice of humour requested "soup" for water was soup and soup was water at such an occasion. "Soup" the word sometimes sounded meaningless to us who kept vigil during the dreary and almost endless nights but even in the midst of the hunger torments it evoked many a smile and oftimes a round of laughter from

others who were awake at the time. We could hardly resist the temptation to make merry at the tantalising method of the request or at the man who poked fun at our boiling water cum-pepper-cum-salt concoction. But our merriment and possibly his dispelled some of the gloom and sadness, as it lightened our burdens to render help abounding within the four walls of our hut.

The word "Soup" had a quite soothing effect on at least the users of the word and to others who appreciated humour in the raw. It sounded nicer than the mere word "water" especially the water in use then which was such a rare, a peculiar and a nauseous makeshift, the habitual use of which, though performing necessary functionary aids to the digestive organs was hourly becoming disagreeable to the men. It "water" or "soup" was regarded as a lesser evil because it helped to prolong life and as our men were undergoing a hungerstrike the use of water was permissible, nay, absolutely necessary. In that connection it was our business to see that the men drank liberally and constantly of the stuff in the interest of their health. At times many of the men rebelled against using it in small or large portions and quite a few wanted to go on thirst as well as hunger strike, a coarse that was discounted from the start.

One of the first men of our hut to show real symptoms of bodily weakness resulting from the strike was the all round Q.M. of our Hughes Garrison Group - Paul Brady. Others, including young Stephen O'Connor, went down, collapsing "because their legs were unable to function". Their spirits were strong enough but their bodies weak. Thus reaction set in, the reaction which

we knew were bound to follow the prolongation of the fast. All were game nevertheless. Paul no less than the others. We, his intimates, could hardly be blamed for paying him special attention. For the previous 24 hours we had noticed his manly efforts to keep on his feet, his legs sagging. We knew, however, that he was determined and would make a big fight. He was not the type to yield easily. What an ordeal he must have gone through when eventually the time came for him to take to bed and await the coarse of events. Poor Paul, the mild the tender, and the good was wasting fast, so fast indeed that he had to be given proper medical attention, being transferred to the Camp hospital.

From that time onwards the number of men in bed increased. The crisis for some had arrived. Sooner than many expected and perhaps sooner than they themselves anticipated. Some big and otherwise strong men were numbered with the small and delicate ones in that respect All were trying to disguise the fact of their collapsing state. There came a time when they too would have to seek refuge in bed there to continue their hunger strike fight. No complaining, no whining, no cringing emanated from their lips - only regrets that they were not able to keep on their feet "to see the thing through" that way. Regrets also for putting us to such trouble in looking after them and attending to them. Regrets and apologies for being so human, nay, more than human in solicitude for others. As if we could look after those poor emaciated frames that were once strong bodies, once healthy active human beings. Oh! the truly wonderous greatness, the marvellous nobility of them all. They were each and all truly wonderful and truly magnificent - gallant fighters, brave soldiers, faithful comrades, who true to their plighted word gave visible proof of their

fidelity, their faith and their love for the ideals they held so dear. No words of surrender escaped their parched lips; no words that would imply that their desire to yield or give up the fight. On the contrary they preferred to continue on hunger striek, come what might.

The days and nights wore on. Long and dreary they were for most of the men from the tenth day of the strike when our hut became a veritable hospital ward with so many lying in bed unable to rise and attend to their wants and desires. We helped these, nursed them as best we could, the few men still on their feet assisting us as best they could, which for a few of the latter caused an effort. Herein was a sublime spirit, a wonderful exhibition of charity and love - the weak helpeing their weaker comrades. They and we nursed them as tenderly as we could and as well as we were able, under such terrible and frightful circumstances. Truly our M.O. - Martin Finn had a big task to perform in looking after the many hundred of men then on the hunger strike sick list and supervising the groups of men in the various huts who were rendering aid. Time and again he was positively alarmed at the serious condition of some of the weaker patients. He was also alarmed and anxious about us, their helpers, who during that time were sacrificing much of our sleep and all of our otherwise off duty periods attending the men. This caused us great effort because we were so few. Consequently the strain was telling on us also What with little sleep and a meagre indulgence in food, imposed it must be repeated by ourselves, because we had not the heart to eat, our energies were being sadly depleted. We could think of nothing but "our men" then growing weaker everyday; some of them so very weak as to cause us much anxiety lest they would go under.

"Stick it out, boys! Stick it out!" was a commonplace slogan in use during that period and had been so for quite a long time. It held a meaning for us in those days when our endurance was tested. "Stick it out, boys" became a watchword a password, a virtual slogan of defiance. "Stick it out, boys!" Already these men were giving proof of their determination to implement the phrase they had not to be reminded of it. They meant to "stick it out".

Perhaps we brought them some little solace as we tried to render them help in their weakening and afflicted moments. Not as much as we would have liked and certainly no less than we were capable of, and while engaged in looking after their temporal and bodily comforts the affairs of the soul - the spiritual aids were being attended to by the Camp Chaplains. That spiritual aid and administration was of immense and supreme importance at the time for it broke down the barrier that divided the prisoners from the Church. It was a big advance from the letter and spirit of the Bishops Pastoral edict which up till then had weighed heavily on us. This edict meant the denial of the sacraments unless we recognised the Free State as the rightful governmental authority and we solemnly undertook not to take up arms again. That Pastoral had been in operation for a considerable time previous to the hunger strike. It sought to get us to mend our ways, to obtain an admission of wrong doing on our part in our armed opposition to the Government - that we were wrong and the Staters were right - that we were wrong in the course we had or were pursuing - fighting. That decree unfortunately alienated many hundreds of men in Gormanston from partaking of the Sacraments, who refused to comply with the conditions contained therein, and showed no inclination to accept the Free State as a

lawful authority and were unprepared to give an undertaking to recant military opposition against it. otherwise the "signing of the form" was regarded as a reversal of opposition. The vast majority of the prisoners refused the latter course as a matter of political and national principle.

The imposition of the Pastoral Decree had a very bad effect on the men who felt penalised because they could not practice to the full, their religious duties so dear to them. Some did, however, carry on and received the Eucharistic Bread of Life at various times, daily, weekly or monthly. It goes without saying that these were envied their very fortunate favour in that respect to be enabled to perform their spiritual duties in that way. That Decree was always a sore, a thorny and a delicate subject with the internees. Many a man felt it harder than the most rigorous punishment harder even than the severest ordeal of imprisonment or internment. It was pitiful in the extreme to be cut away from the one consoling, the one embracing and the one Loving Source of Life - the Bread of Life; to have to commune with our Maker and Our Lord only from a distance and none too intimately. Some, perhaps all - some more than others - felt this most keenly. That it was a sad time and a truly saddening circumstance, who could deny? More than either of these things it was a suffering that was painful as it was bitter. A happy ending, or was it a respite, became manifest when during the period of hungerstrike the Camp Chaplains came amongst us and gave spiritual administrations and succour to the hunger strikers. It was a magnanimous gesture, a sublime act of religious sentiment and a truly generous condescension on the part of the Church. We in turn were

deeply impressed, intensely proud and genuinely edified by the graciousness of that symbolic act of love and the noblest form of charity. Nothing could have given us greater joy. Nothing could have made us more happy and satisfied than this. We welcomed that wonderful favour even as we welcomed with open arms God's Holy Annointed in dispensing such bountiful graces. Coming as it did in that sad and yet glorious way when many of our comrade internees were in the midst of a crucial ordeal and in the presence of a holocaust that was fast enshrouding us, it was gratifying to know, it was grand to feel that such ministrations were forthcoming. Verily it made amends for the past, wiped out the past and gave to many the consolation and the happiness which was so sorely needed.

Who could be other than impressed by the moving, edifying scenes which were to be witnessed daily in the Camp as chaplains and acolyte made their way - the Lord's Annointed bearing the Sacred Host, the acolyte ringing the bell - passing from hut to hut on their mission of mercy. There was no fuss and no unseemly demonstration in the performance of that religious act that assuredly brought peace and happiness to many troubled souls and many a tired aching body. Would that full justice could be given to that truly Heavenly scene or succession of scenes, in relation to which the riches of life were but so much dross and of which man's greatness was void and of small account. Was it not hard for us to suppress our human emotions, to check the tears that readily and freely filled many eyes or be not overcome by the Presence of Him who was about His Father's business. Could it be otherwise than that we, those of us who were able to be about, should salute Him in praise for His Goodness, worshipping Him in his coming and going through the Camp. The simplicity of the performance captivated

one, as it was bound to us do. Every prayer or ejaculation that the priest recited on his round of the Camp from hut to hut and from bed to bed, or the more solemn ones said at the bedside of men who were adjudged to be gravely ill, produced spontaneous humble responses from all the prisoners. Thank God we had lived to see that day and to sitness those truly remarkable and awe inspiring scenes even though the occasion was a sad and distressing one for not a few of the hunger strikers.

In this wise the days and the nights passed and when the fifteenth day of the hunger strike came there was evidence that we were facing a very critical moment in relation to the strike and effecting the general welfare of the men involved. It was a tense and anxious time for us who were attending to the wants of so many frail men. Some of them were barely hanging on to life by slender threads while even the strong and burly were showing signs of physical weakness under the strain and rigours of that long food fast. Our hut, other huts also, registered an uncommon number of bed patients. A few of the more robust were "sticking it out" more by will power and a strong governing spirit than any other known or unknown reason. They also knew that some day, perhaps the next one, or the following, at some future date their lot will be cast in the refuge of bed.

When will this end? How can it end? The Free State authorities had made various attempts to wreck the strike and to wean the hunger strikers from their course and purpose. They had even tempted some of the men with dainty dishes. But their efforts had failed. Sheer determination to see the strike through to victory predominated; many of the men had reached the stage in which regard for food was the least of their thoughts -

pains, aches and general debility ravaged them, more than the want or consideration of food. We, who tended them, a task which we were proud to fulfil, were perhaps the most disturbed. We keenly felt our weakness and realised the difficulties of providing adequate assistance and succour to our comrades. To make matters worse we had not the necessary wherewithall or means to alleviate their sufferings in any way and little means to give them ordinary comfort. The little we could do was freely and energetically exercised as a matter of duty. Sadly and distressfully we were witnesses of a drama that was being staged against great odds, and what a truly great and extraordinary drama it was, a real true to life representation of human endurance, suffering and determination.

Could we but close our eyes to the sight and close our ears to the sounds of the words, the moans and the sufferings of those men lying there, some of them unable to sleep satisfyingly or only to sleep in spasms? Look at the cast in the scenes. See that young man lying in bed a few yards away - that "slip of a lad" of 18 or 19 years Behold him - his pale, wan thin face, his thin limbs, his almost childlike form, hardly perceptable beneath the few blankets that cover him. A few days ago he was all life and living boyishly. That face was normal and healthy, tanned in summer and almost blood red in winter with the warm glow of the sun and the health giving ozone from the sea and the biting cold winds that blew in the respective seasons. Would you not say that he was going down life's ladder and sinking very low and you would be right.

Look at that man yonder, that matured, middle aged man, one who was of big stout physique, full blooded

strong and burly. See him then quiet, almost inanimate in bed. A man who did not know what it was to be quiet, and who could not be kept quiet. He was in fact lively as a bee and the very life of the hut as he was always up to fun to frolics and to banter. Looking at him there you would say "That's not he". Undoubtedly there was not a lot of him in it then, if you were to exclude his ready smile and the right good humour which he gave vent to occasionally, even in his weakened and weakening condition of health. Pity he was reduced to that state. Were it otherwise he would assuredly be a great stimulus to us all, to keep the blues away and a help in meeting adversity.

Or again, behold that grey-haired man who had passed the 60 year mark. You would call him a warrior if you knew him as well as we did. He was that in every sense of the word. His past life in the service of Ireland was one long succession of endeavour and devotion being at one time or other an insurgent, a felon, a guerrillist, an internee!. During the full 15 days of the hunger strike he was no less a warrior, sticking it out, fighting for life.Hitherto he loved walking, books, reading and a few card games. Many a time he regaled us with spicy yarns, reminiscences of stirring events and full descriptive stories, local and national that were always interesting to us, helping thereby to kill time, our most inscrutable and dangerous enemy. Looking at him then as he lay in bed you might not notice that he had changed physically or mentally. His weather beaten, aged, wrinkled face was as composed and as apparently untroubled as it ever was. You might safely conclude that he was just resting as indeed he was but it was not the type of resting that could be said to be quite beneficial or composing to body or mind. Thus you would be wrong in assuming that he was quite all right, for all that particular time he, our warrior comrade, was in the worst

throes of the fast and so acutely ill that he could slip life's knot easily. We missed his resonant voice We missed his lively active personality and his pleasant breezy company. There he lay in what might be regarded as his bed of death, consigned there when a few hours previously he collapsed, because warrior-like, he refused to give in to his bodily aches and weaknesses.

The foregoing representation of types and characters of those engaged on the hunger strike could be multiplied a hundredfold as the sixteenth day ushered in. Marvellous to relate we were still spared a tragedy, although the dread shadow of death hung very close to many participants of the hunger strike. Nothing short of a miracle could avert a tragedy, the death of one or a number of men. What an awful thing to contemplate and anticipate? Flesh and blood alone could hardly suffice to withstand the rigors and ravages of that long fast, indefinitely, without proper nursing, and even moderate comfort, and in the midst of a very cold atmosphere, accentuated by a very restricted fuel supply that was hardly sufficient to provide hot water to one container and it to serve eighty humans. It was a question of time as to when any one of the men might go under. The men were brave, magnificently brave in an individual and collective sense. How long more would they be able to bear up under this most terrible and searching strain? Perhaps the feeling that others were similarly circumstanced and undergoing similar trials - the consolation that arises from a common kinship and collective endeavour, was in some measure responsible for giving to such men courage and espirit de force in their fight up to that time. But such had limitation as when certain men reached a condition of health which merited the description "extremely low". Then the

Then the fight became a personal and a really individual one whereby isolation and the sense of isolation became the accepted order of things in relation to the waging of the hunger strike as a weapon of offense and defense.

One very sad feature emerged at that time, also: some of the men had lost the sense of asking for water. Others found it hard to swallow. Generally speaking, most of the hungerstrikers had got tired of the "brew". In many instances we found the greatest difficulty to get them to continue drinking such, having to coax them,to compel them, and to assist them to take it often. Oh! it was heart-rending! The painful scenes that we witnessed then were enough to affect one's nerves, any of our nerves, at a time when we were already at the extreme limit of our endurance and the feeling of utter frustration and insignifance resulting therefrom and due to our inability to render suitable help to our men. We too had to other option but to "stick it out". Any lagging or any neglect of duty on our part might have serious and lamentable consequences for our patients. Fortunately - or was it unfortunate - we had no time to think of other matters except their welfare, which incensed us to continue doing our work in the best possible manner. Plain work it was but it was our duty in the discharging of which we paid little attention to ourselves in order to bring some kind of amelioration to them. We trusted, nay we prayed that we would be spared witnessing a holocaust. Yet all the time we ~~all the time we~~ had unpleasant forebodings that some such would occur if that long hunger fast were to continue another few days or another week.

What will it be like tomorrow - the next day and many days after? We could only shudder ~~at the cruel~~

at the cruel thought of continuing looking at such sights, as those that then confronted us on all sides. The Sixteenth day! Memorable days they were - every one of them days of fast, of struggle, and of endurance, days of heroism, nobility and defiance. Sixteen days, every moment of which, every second, ever fraction of a second ticked off life's calender, making the onward passage of Destiny - to live or to die. Sixteen days when, lo! a sliver cloud shone in the heavens, and while the gravely ill were on the brink of life's highway and those who were not so low as to be in imminent danger of death and while we who laboured and nursed mused and meditated a peculiar and extraordinary piece of news flashed round "The strike is off". No more startling news could have been imparted at such a time. What magic words! What truly beautiful words they were - words of peace, quietitude, health-giving and life - assuring words of hope, of good cheer and of joy. So they might have been had not a new meaning entered into the original message terminating the hunger strike - a message which implied that "the strike was called off". Called off! Why and towards what end?

Obviously the words and the message conveyed a double meaning. They portended an end to the strike but not an end to the prisoners' captivity. Sad and bitter were the comments of the men when the full import of the words began to be realised and understood. "We are beaten". We had to give in" were the most common remarks and statements of most people. Beaten....had to...give.. in.." and so it was.

That was not the end they sought. They were disappointed when it came that way. Had they the choice it would have been otherwise. They would have stuck it

out. They had fought a good fight, fought under exceptionally trying circumstances and against exrremely adverse difficulties. They were great men, all of them. Some, in the beginning had entered into the strike somewhat lightly and light-heartedly - full of hope, flushed with enthusiasm, angered at the thought of being indefinitely interned. They had learned a lot since, or during that time. They had suffered much and endured much and the occasion of the end of the great fast found many of them the worst of the wear. Some of these would have to receive very special nursing and attention to bring them back to their normal health. God be praised it was over!= Of the few who were glad were some of us who tended these men. Personally I gave a big sigh of relief at its termination, thankful that we were spared many tragedies, though proud of the men for their great and unselfish devotion and exquisite self-sacrifice.

Chapter 32.

The final decision for "calling the hungerstrike off" had, it appeared, been indicated by orders of the I.R.A. authorities outside. That order applied to all the prison and camps involved in the strike and on the ground that a further prolongation was undesirable. Stress was laid on the point that the men had made their protest. Their courage and patriotism were liberally recognised.

Unfortunately the road to recovery was not an easy one for some of the men particularly those whose conditions of health were so low as to merit their being spoon fed and on a kind of dietary scale - with due apologies to the diet. Immediately after the announcement

of the cessation of the strike the men received a supply of hot milk served to them in their huts. Instructions had been issued advising the men to go easy with food and not to eat coarse food at the beginning or if they did to only partake of it in small quantities. Our cooks worked hard to help in dispensing light dishes, within the limitations imposed by the rations supplied. Then the men, since the strike was ended, advised their people outside to send parcels of food supplying various luxuries, cornflour, custard, jellies etc. When these arrived cooking de luxe got into full swing. Our group and other groups in our hut produced dishes that formerly were unheard of as soon as materials became available. All of which helped to some extent in bringing men back to something approaching their former vitality. But not all men would conform to a diet Some ravenous for food, eat anything they came across and suffered much as a result.

Quite a considerable number of men were unable even with care and a careful diet to quickly recover health and strength. One such was my dear pal and fellow officer Bob Oman. His health, it could be easily seen was entirely undermined for he had contracted some ailment, which was to remain with him for a long time. One of the most wonderful recoveries was Paul Brady who soon on his feet, continued looking after the wants of his flock. In many instances we had more than an abundance of cooks. They were not uncommonly too numerous and of course variable in their preparations of dishes until a reasonable time arrived when feeling sufficiently convalescent a return to the camp ration became an absolute necessity and the prospect of an early release less optimistic.

Due largely to the weakened condition of the men and because many were disheartened at the unfavourable course that the hunger strike protest had taken the ordinary camp routine slowed down considerably. There was, however, no indication of disorganisation or disruption apparent or perceived to exist but it was fairly evident that a little looseness in discipline and restraint crept amongst us which to some extent marred an otherwise happy fraternity. Inertia and disillusionment affected a few but on the whole the temper and spirit of the internees remained firmly rooted. Whatever lapses occurred were only of a trivial and of momentary character, none of which related to the question of national policy or ideals, at least to any appreciable degree or for any subversive purposes.

This brought us into the cold, dark and memorable November month, a month that heralded a new and mostly startling movement - the release of some of the internees. At first these releases were regarded as so many tricks and deceptions which were intended to still further embarass and confound us on the promise of an early large-scale release. But facts are facts, notwithstanding, and when impetus was given to a sometimes intermittent and at other times constant exodus of men homeward bound, hope surged in the breast of quite a large number for their longed for liberation; a hope which grew apace in view of the variety of types and the status of men who were thus singularly passed from our midst to rehabilitate themselves in ordinary life. Yet not all such as passed through the gates of Gormanston Internment Camp were actually released. Some were, but it fell to the sad lot of quite a number to be instead transferred to another incarcerating venue. That happened in the case of our Camp O.C. Oscar Traynor,

P. Holohan and others who were subsequently "lodged" in Mountjoy. Mysterious moves indeed.

We wondered what was the significance of and the reason for such moves at a time when despite rumours there was no sign of a total release of prisoners. The only deduction that could be made was that these certain officers and important men amongst the internees had been picked out for special punishment or at least that they would not be accorded liberation in the interest of State policy. Undoubtedly that very strange move gave rise to the query - where would any of us fit into such a plan which conceived the separation of the chaff from the grain? Soon we were to know when in December a large group of internees, notified in advance, were set in motion and despatched not homeward bound, of if so, not to their homes, but to other various destinations, to other internment camps. Thus, I and a big contingent, of ex-Gormanston Camp internees mingled freely but not very free-willed with internees in Newbridge Military Barracks then an Internment Camp for comrade soldiers of the I.R.A. There we resumed our lives as internees for another space of time;in my case three weeks. Then on a day before Christmas Eve 1923, between mixed feelings of joy and sorrow I packed my few belongings and bid goodbye to intimate comrades and boarded a train for Dublin. If I shed no tears or expressed only a few words of sorrow for the parting it was because the air was fully charged with rumours that the Camp was to be cleared before Christmas. Thus I bade adieu to eighteen months of captivity and parted company with many loving friends and very dear comrades, good men and true, who loving Ireland, served her in dark and troubled days and of whom it could be said whatever their other faults and failings, they lived up

to the best traditions of their race in suffering and travail within the compass of prison walls or barbed wires of internment camps.

Vale the past - the past that had been a thorny rugged pathway upon which we had trudged wearisome and not always unwilling footsteps in pursuit of Freedom's Goal, always hoping against hope, trusting the measure of our own sincerity and loyalty, braving trouble and danger and ever looking onward towards a better time when "righteous men shall make our land" a nation once again. Vale the past our past, the militant past that helped the re-incarnation of the Fenian Spirit and Ideal inthe birth and growth of the gound guard of Eireann, na Fianna Eireann and the still more matured Irish Volunteers, each moulded into the Army of the Irish Republic by trials, sufferings, sacrifices, through an era of brave endeavour of big devotion and strong attachment to the National Weal. The past is gone - like a wisp of straw that is carried away by the breeze it passes from pillar to post ever onward in the march of time, a glory and a legacy to those who bore their share in the doings and affairs national in Ireland's cause to rally.

Vale the Past - and as we bade it a fond goodbye other thoughts arose, less sustaining, if not more perturbing than before, our six, or ten or twelve glorious years were gone forever - but what of the future?

Signed Seán Prendergast
(Sean Prendergast)

Date 12th Feb 1953
12th Feb. 1953

Witness M F Ryan Comdt
(M.F. Ryan) Comd't.