ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRE MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 833

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 833

Witness

Michael Knightly,
65 St. Laurence Road,
Clontarf,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of 'F' Company,
1st Battalion, Dublin Brigade, 1916.

Subject.

G.P.O., Dublin,
Easter Week, 1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY MR. MICHAEL KNIGHTLY

Chief Reporter to Dáil Éireann, residing at 65,
St. Lawrence's Road, Clontarf, Dublin.

Story of Easter Week 1916, and subsequent events.

"What is the use? It will only be a massacre". This was the comment of a patriotic Irish girl to whom I remarked during a performance of "The Dreamers" - a play dealing with Robert Emmet's Rising - in the Abbey Theatre, some time before Easter Week, that another Rising was in the offing. "What matter", I said, "it will keep up the old spirit".

During Easter Week my words were recalled one night I chanced to have tea with Mr. J.J. McElligott, afterwards Secretary to the Department of Finance and, up to then, a First Division Clerk in the British Civil Service. He had been on the roof of the G.P.O. and I was at a window on the ground floor. We chanced to meet at tea and he asked me "How do you think things will turn out?" I replied, rather pessimistically, "Of course we shall all be wiped out". "What matter", he said, "it will keep up the old spirit". His remarks recalling to my mind my conversation in the Abbey Theatre were a source of satisfaction to me.

I had concealed my pessimism from those with whom I had been on duty for they were burning with enthusiasm and convinced that we were going to win. I envied their optimism and felt it would be cruel to say anything that might discourage them.

Needless to say, I had no inside information about the Rising or I would not have made the remark which I did to my friend in the Abbey Theatre. However, before Easter Week, if I had any doubts as to the inevitability of the Rising, they were removed by certain happenings. I was a member of F/Coy. (Dublin) 1st Battalion Volunteers. One night, our captain,

Mr. Fionan Lynch - later Circuit Judge Lynch - announced at a weekly parade that he had got an ultimatum from the educational authorities to sever his connection with the Volunteers or sacrifice his job as a teacher. He intimated that he was leaving the decision to the Executive of the Volunteers. At a subsequent parade he announced his resignation as captain and added; "When the time for action comes I shall be with you again". The week before the Rising he significantly resumed his captaincy and reminded us of his declaration on the occasion of his resignation.

I had further confirmation of the forthcoming Rising. The next afternoon I was about to open the door of the office in Abbey St. of the Irish Working Journalists' Association, of which I was president, when Mr. Piaras Beaslai, who was secretary of the association, rushed to the door. I hesitated about entering as I suspected that there was some secret meeting in progress. On seeing who was there he asked me in and proceeded to introduce me to Commandant Ned Daly, Tom Clarke's brother-in-law, who was afterwards executed, and Mr. Frank Fahy, who had been one of my teachers in the Christian Brothers School, Tralee. I observed that they were going over a Dublin street map. Piaras Beaslai asked me if I was turning out on Sunday. I said: "I am detailed to report the Teachers' Congress in Cork. If it is an ordinary parade I am not turning out, but if it is anything worth losing a job over you can count on me". "Well", he said, "jobs wont count". I said: "That is good enough; I will be there". My mind was occupied with the coming events in the next few days and I felt drawn to them as if by a magnet.

I was at early Mass on Sunday and remained indoors all day awaiting a mobilisation order. In the evening a Volunteer called and informed me that everything was off.

Next morning I was engaged in the 'Irish Independent' offices summarising an advance copy of the speech of the

President of the Teachers' Organisation when the news came that the G.P.O. had been taken by the Citizen Army. I was to travel to Cork later. I surveyed the position and, seeing that the Rising was not confined to the Citizen Army, determined to join up. I scouted about during the day and in the evening informed a sympathetic colleague, the late Mr. Fred Cogley, of my determination. He offered to accompany me to the G.P.O., saying that he would like to see Sean McDermott. As I was afraid he might remain if he once came in, I advised him to go home, remarking that this was no married man's job. I asked him to take what money I had. "Keep it", he said, "you may want it". "I shall have no use for it" I said. He refused to take it. Remarking that probably some Tommy would take it from my dead body, I bade him goodbye.

Lest my reference to the Citizen Army might be taken to suggest a disinclination to join up with them, I should state that I became very friendly with members of that army and there were no finer fellows in the Rising.

I proceeded to the G.P.O. and knocked at the main door. The door was opened by The O'Rahilly to whom I explained that I was a Volunteer belonging to F/Company and that I desired to join up. He received me most cordially. "Is there anybody there", he asked, "who can identify you?" "Of course", he continued, "I do not doubt your word, but you understand we have got to take precautions". "I quite understand", I replied, and on looking into the G.P.O., I saw Sean McDermott and said "Mr. McDermott can identify me". Sean McDermott came to the door, shook hands, and introduced me to The O'Rahilly. "Have you got any news", he asked eagerly. "The only news I have" I replied "is that Artillery are on their way from Athlone". "Damn it" he said, "only for MacNeill yesterday we would have the whole country with us. As it is we might get some terms". To this I did not reply. I had

heard the matter discussed by my colleagues during the day and one conclusion come to was that every man who signed the Proclamation would be shot.

The O'Rahilly, thinking, I suppose, that a reporter would not be much use as a gunman, conducted me to the kitchen and put me to work with two British soldiers who had been members of the guard when the G.P.O. was captured. Mr. Desmond Fitzgerald was in charge. The soldiers were preparing tea and were as cheerful as if nothing out of the ordinary had taken place. I asked one of them if he thought the place would be stormed. "No", he said, "I think it will be shelled". I had formed the idea that the building would be stormed by a bombing party. I discussed their capture with them. One of the soldiers, an Irishman, was very upset about the corporal. "The worst of it is", he said, "the corporal was out for a pint when the place was taken". I reassured him by saying that he would make a good excuse. He would probably say he had escaped.

P.H. Pearse, who was moving about slowly, as if in deep thought, came along soon after I took up duty in the kitchen and asked me to fill all the available vessels with water as there was a danger that the water might be cut off. In the yard I found a number of milk tankards - there was a restaurant in the G.P.O. - and I filled these. I returned to the kitchen. Later, an officer entered and said he was looking for some Volunteers to take over the Gas Company's premises in Hawkins St. "If you get me a gun" I said, "I will go". He got me a single-barreled shotgun. He asked me to report in the main hall in a quarter of an hour. I did so, where I was joined by a few others. The officer came along and informed us that it had been decided not to take over the Gas Company's place. I was then placed on duty at one of the windows on the ground floor, but soon after, was asked to do sentry duty. It was then night-time. A number of us were marched down Henry St.

I was placed at the door of the Coliseum Theatre and told that I was to watch out for British troops. I was given the password - "Tramway" - and told if I saw any troops coming I was to get back immediately and report. I would be relieved, I was informed, at 2 a.m. The chances were, I thought, that Headquarters would forget all about me. At about 1 a.m. there was a great burst of firing about Capel St. A Volunteer who had been placed further down the street came rushing up and shouted "come on, they are coming". I said: "Hold on. Let us make sure before we move. There is no use making fools of ourselves". The firing subsided and I advised the Volunteer to go back to his post. "You are in a grand place here" he said "I am posted under a lamp". At 2 a.m. precisely I was relieved and returned to my ground floor below. Amongst my companions here were Noel Lemass and a young lad from Maynooth who had got a seat to Dublin, bringing with him a rook rifle; also a breadvan driver who had no previous connection with the Volunteers. At a later stage I asked the latter if he had been to confession. He replied: "No, I do not think it matters as I believe I would go straight to heaven if killed here". I informed him that a priest was in the building hearing confessions and that he had better go, which he did.

On Tuesday there was quite a crowd outside the G.P.O. I asked one of the crowd to get me a "Stop Press", handing him a shilling. He did not return for some time. Eventually he handed me in a paper through the window from which all glass had been removed and asked me to throw him out some money. My reply was not polite.

After Tuesday machine guns were played on us at intervals. My chief trouble was to get the young lad from Maynooth to keep under cover. He was too intent on getting a shot.

At night lights were turned off. James Connolly, who appeared to be the most active of the senior officers, used to enter and order that nobody was to fire. Occasionally a shot went off accidentally and he would ask in an angry voice: "Who fired that shot?" He struck me as being a man of exceptionally forcible character. I thought what a great general he would make in more favourable circumstances. Mr. Diarmuid Lynch, who was in charge of our room, was on the move continuously.

On the Wednesday - when O'Connell St. was a 'No Man's Land' - there was a requisition for food from the Imperial Hotel. A call was made for volunteers to take food across. Noel Lemass volunteered at once. "Mind those for me till I come back", he said to me, handing me a mirror and comb. "Will he ever come back," I thought. He got a sack on his shoulder. There was a signal to open the door at the opposite side. On this being done, accompanied by one or two others he made a rush across the street under rapid rifle fire. I watched breathlessly wondering if he would get there unhurt. He appeared to have done so. He did not appear to be any more concerned about what he was doing than if he was going on an ordinary message. He was blind to danger. I thought then, and often thought later, that he was the type who would win highest military distinction for bravery. I met him at an aeridheacht in Mrs. O'Carroll's grounds after I returned from Frongoch and asked him how he had fared later in the fray. "Oh", he said, "two of t tried to take a machine gun but the bally fellow turned the gun round and got me in the legs". I think it was about this time that a man appeared in front of the G.P.O. - he had come apparently from a side street - threw up his cap and shouted: "I am a Dublin Fusilier and want to die like a Dublin Fusilier". Rifle fire rang out from the Tommies down about O'Connell Bridge and this time the fire was immediately effective. The poor fellow crumpled up.

All this time I had been suffering from a carbuncle - of all unimportant things - on my throat. The trouble started on Easter Monday with a slight swelling. It continued during the week and, though I knew I had a high temperature, I did not want to fall down on my job. In addition to my shotgun, I had procured a sort of croppy pike which I kept handy in case there was an attempt to rush my window. Though I hated the idea of shooting, I was determined to hold my window at all costs and I thought if it came to quick action my shotgun would be useless. I treasured my pike which I kept on a ledge at the side of the window on which I could stand and fight.

On the Thursday night a comrade advised me to see the doctor. I refused, saying it was not worth while. Eventually he informed Diarmuid Lynch and I was conducted to the back of the building where my temperature was taken. The doctor said: "You must lie up at once". "I will have to acquaint the officer-in-charge of my room" I said. "Can you walk?", he asked. I was surprised and said: "Certainly". I went out and informed Diarmuid Lynch. I was glad to get the chance of a sleep. I was given a glass of brandy and fixed up with a rug. In a few minutes I was fast asleep. The next thing I remembered was being awakened by a member of the Cumann na mBan who asked me to come along to the Coliseum. The building was then on fire and an occasional shell was falling. I had slept through the heavy bombardment. Feeling very thirsty, I went to a water tap in the yard and drank a considerable quantity of water.

I next joined a small procession wending its way slowly through holes in the walls to the Coliseum Theatre. Immediately in front of me on a stretcher was a son of Paddy McGrath, a friend of mine, who was fighting elsewhere. He had been shot in the eye. I thought he was dying. I was amazed when he asked, as he was being put through a hole in the wall, "Nurse, where are we going now?".

After some negotiations, headed by the late Father John O'Flanagan of the Pro-Cathedral, carrying a white flag, we were conducted to Jervis St. Hospital, where my throat was lanced. The lady who took such a kindly interest in me in the G.P.O. informed me that my temperature when taken was 104 and that they thought I had diphtheria. Once my throat was lanced I felt quite at ease. Dr. Louis Byrne, City Coroner, who was Visiting Physician to Jervis St. and a very good friend, suggested smuggling me up to one of the wards from the accident room. I expressed my gratitude, but said that I could not desert my comrades; that I was in this adventure and was prepared to take the consequences. A few of our group were in uniform. He said that he would provide clothes if any of them wanted to get rid of his uniform. A North Co. Dublin man availed of the offer. An elderly Citizen Army man confided to me that he had been in the Royal Artillery and if the British found this out he would probably be shot. He was accompanied by his son, and he informed me that he had two other boys in the Rising. I advised him to make an excuse, remarking that as the rest of us would not be offering any excuse his case would be all the stronger.

Before our removal to the Rotunda Hospital lawn on Sunday morning, where we were to join our comrades, we were asked by the officer-in-charge of our guard if any of us had anything to say. My friend, the Artillery man, played the old soldier in good style, stating that his son and himself were returning from Fairyhouse Races. As they were passing the G.P.O. there was firing. They took shelter in a doorway. The door was open; they entered and could not get out. In Richmond Barracks I learned from Captain Dick Stokes, who had been in Jacob's Factory, that this man's other two sons, who had been with him, had escaped. The father was greatly relieved. Soon after our arrival in Wakefield prison both himself and his son were released.

While in Jervis St. we were visited by Father Byrne of the Pro-Cathedral, afterwards Archbishop of Dublin, who asked me if any one of us wanted to go to confession. One man did but he was not a Volunteer. I realised this later when I saw the large quantity of tobacco that was taken from his pockets. He got mixed up with us somehow.

Before our removal from Jervis St. Hospital the members of Cumann na mBan were released. I had been discussing the possible consequences with one of them. I said: "They will shoot every man who signed the Proclamation, possibly some more. The rest of us will be kicked out and this is the worst that can happen. The greater the punishment the better the results". "If we are turned free", I added, "it will be an Irish idea, not an English one". Little did I think that the paper I had worked for would advocate this policy. I was worked up at the time as I thought of what was likely to happen, especially the shooting of our leaders and the humiliation of the rank and file. I burst into tears. A Church St. priest, who was standing close by, said: "Ah, be a man". I felt very hurt but made no reply. Our comrades had been removed before we reached the Rotunda. We were marched from the Rotunda Hospital on Sunday evening to Ship St. Barracks. In the barrack yard we were surrounded by English soldiers who amused themselves by telling us what was going to happen. "Off to the shooting gallery, boys" one of them said. I treated the matter as a joke, but when I saw a Volunteer being marched off in the middle of a group of military, as if to execution, I changed my mind. "He is going" the soldier said, "and your turn is coming". For the moment I believed he was right and as I had made up my mind to offer no excuse for my participation in the Rising (in fact welcomed the opportunity to fight for a small nation) I felt like a condemned man. But there are consolations in

the worst situations. After all, I thought, it could be worse. If I were pinned under a burning beam in the G.P.O. how much worse it would be.

Our belongings were taken from us in Ship St. and we were placed in the guardroom where some men from other areas were already lodged. The dressing on my throat had come away. Captain ffrench Mullen, who had been wounded in the fight at the South Dublin Union, tried to procure some cotton wool from his bandaged leg for my throat and eventually called the guard and told them that I should be attended to. I was marched with a revolver at my back to the Castle Hospital, where my throat was treated and bandaged by a military doctor. The doctor was very interested in the happenings of the week and was curious to know where I had been and how things went. I said that I did not mind stating that I was a Volunteer and had been in the G.P.O. "What was the fighting like?" he asked. I said that we did not get much opportunity to fight as his people had used incendiary shells on the building. "Where did you fellows learn to shoot" he asked. "Those on our side" I said, "are intelligent young men. They had their hearts in the job and had not to be taught how to shoot".

On rejoining my comrades I felt that there was at least one doubtful character among us, a man I believed to be a soldier in mufti. His job, apparently, was to find out if we had been expecting assistance from the Germans. As we tried to sleep he shouted "Oh, look at the airship", jumping up and pointing to a window. He continued his buffoonery. The cell door was opened. He was dragged out and a lot of noise was made as if he was receiving a beating. He was thrown back into the cell and lay as if helpless on the floor. Some of our fellows were inclined to be sympathetic and were about to go to his aid when I

said: "Let him alone, he deserves what he got".

We were marched from Ship St. to Richmond Barracks, On the way the followers of the British garrison showed their hostility, to the apparent pleasure of our guards, but some encouragement was also offered. A woman in a window opposite St. Audoen's Church cheered enthusiastically and shouted "Keep your hearts up, you will live to fight again". How right she was! She was absolutely fearless and her encouragement at that stage had the effect of a tonic.

In Richmond Barracks we were herded like cattle and, as some unkindly acts of soldiers have been described by others, I should like to contrast the action of a Sherwood Forester. His battalion had suffered severely at Mount St. Bridge, but he made no complaint. I discovered that in searching me at Ship St. the military failed to find 1s.6d. which I had in a small vest pocket. I asked this soldier if he would get me some cigarettes. He said he would do his best and I gave him a shilling. After a few hours he returned with two packets of Woodbines. "These were all I was able to get", he said, "and as I thought the change would be of no use to you I brought you chocolate for the balance". Those who were in Richmond Barracks, where our daily ration was three hard biscuits and a tin of bully beef, can appreciate how welcome the chocolate was. Indeed, I must say that my experience of British Tommies, both in the 1916 period and later when I had experience of at least a half-a-dozen different groups was that their conduct generally was considerate. I am aware that others had not the same experience. In Richmond Barracks I was introduced to Dick McKee who subsequently had charge of the Dublin Brigade. Our friendship lasted till his murder in the Castle in 1920, when I was a prisoner in Mountjoy. In 1916 he looked smart in his uniform of which he seemed proud. A young man of fine intelligence, he was as simple as a child.

"Apparently", he remarked to me - forgetting that he was an officer - as he saw a group of prisoners, including Sean McDermott, pass - "we are not going to be treated as prisoners of war". "They are making no distinction between the officers and men". I felt inclined to reply that the distinction would be made at the courtmartial, but, realising Dick's simplicity of character, I held my peace.

We slept in our clothes on the floor of our room, huddled together for warmth. During the day we watched from a window some of our leaders being conducted to a room for courtmartial. I saw J.J. Walsh, head up, and apparently very proud of his part, being led in. Outside the room I noticed John McBride standing with a raincoat across his arm looking quite unconcerned. Captain Dick Stokes, who fought under him, told me that before the surrender at Jacob's factory, he called some of the officers together. Addressing them he said: "Some of you may live to fight again and, if you do, take the open country for it and avoid a death trap like this".

The prisoners, despite the revolting conditions under which we were kept - a large boiler in the room served as a latrine - were cheerful and uncomplaining. I was particularly impressed by a North Co. Dublin man who had exchanged his uniform in Jervis St. Hospital for an old suit. In fact, it was his brother's uniform. He had not been a Volunteer, but his brother, not turning out, he procured his uniform and rifle and joined up. He was a real philosopher. As we watched the rain from our window one day he remarked: "It is a grand thing to be in from the rain". The prisoners generally were as fine a lot as one could wish to be associated with - clean-minded, patriotic and unselfish - their spirits never flagged.

Our transfer to Wakefield Prison, I am sure, has been described elsewhere. We were paraded on the square at Richmond Barracks and marched in a downpour of rain to the North Wall - about 400 of us - where we were placed, soaking wet, on a cattle boat and hatched down. The sea was rough and the majority of the men suffered from sea-sickness. We were conveyed by special train from Holyhead to Wakefield Prison. As we passed through a station about 8 o'clock in the morning I heard some children shout "Fenians". Evidently they had heard their parents or grandparents discussing the Rising the night before and linking us up with the Fenians. It was about 12 o'clock when we got into our cells, much worn out. I sat on my bed but was quickly aroused by a threatening sergeant who warned that beds were not to be made down until 8 o'clock. The food was poor and very scanty, about enough to enable us to do our half hour's exercise a day, walking around the ring three paces apart and no talking. We were locked up for 23½ hours a day, but occasionally, as a privilege, got out to scrub corridors. As I scrubbed beside Mike Mullan one morning he whispered: "I do not mind scrubbing floors as long as one of William Martin Murphy's reporters is scrubbing beside me". He had not forgotten the fight a few years earlier between Wm. Martin Murphy - the proprietor of the 'Independent' and Jim Larkin whose admirer he was. But of course his remark was jocose.

One night a warder came into my cell. He said: "We are not supposed to talk to you fellows, but I am curious as to how things went in Dublin. I said that they went as we expected "Did you not expect to succeed?" he asked. I said that surely he did not think that we were such simpletons as to expect a handful of men with a few antiquated rifles and shotguns to beat a modern-equipped army. "What do you think of Mr. Redmond" he asked. I replied that if Mr. Redmond had any backbone there

would have been no need for a Rising. "And what do you think of Sir Edward Carson" he asked. I said that I admired him as a leader. My only regret was that he was not a nationalist leader. He seemed pleased at that and then informed me that he was an Ulster Unionist.

I reported Sir Edward Carson in the north later and came to the conclusion that he was not the strong man I had conceived him to be, but that his strength came from the British forces behind him.

As opinion changed outside in favour of the Easter Week men, the British attitude towards the prisoners changed. We were allowed to talk, to receive parcels and were given longer intervals at exercise. Irish girls from Leeds were allowed into the exercise yard on Saturdays and walked with us, giving us the latest news.

Amongst the prisoners were a number from Tralee, my home town. They were disappointed at not having participated in the Rising. Paddy Cahill, who was next in command to Austin Stack, deplored the turn of events. He informed me that Stack kept the plans for the Rising absolutely to himself. After Con Collins's arrest and imprisonment in Tralee R.I.C. barracks Head Constable Kearney sent Stack a message that his friend wanted to see him. Stack regarded it as a friendly message, but Cahill warned him not to go near the barracks. He disregarded the warning and, on arrival at the barracks, was placed in the cell next to Collins. A heavy responsibility was left on Cahill who had no advice as to plans.

I was surprised to find among the prisoners my friend, Sam Ruttle, a brother of Jack Ruttle who trained "Workman" the winner of the Grand National. Sam had nothing in common with his comrades. He was of a different religious persuasion and, if he had any political views, they wertainly were not Sinn Féin; but he was a good mixer and a practical joker, and it was

his joking that landed him in trouble and eventually made him a Sinn Féiner, if not by conviction, at least by stress of circumstances.

Sam had worked in Tralee for Mr. Robert Fitzgerald, D.L., a brother of the Knight of Kerry, who was an estate agent. The estate was sold sometime before Easter 1916 and, when his employment terminated, Sam returned to Adare. While in Tralee he made many friends, among them Austin Stack - socially of course - but politics never entered into their relationship. For old times' sake, he decided to visit Kerry for Easter 1916, and dropped a note to his old friend, Austin, informing him of his intention and stating that he was looking forward to meeting him. When he arrived in Tralee Austin was under lock and key, but Sam proceeded to enjoy himself. On Easter Sunday he hired a taxi to visit Camp, a favourite seaside place some ten miles from Tralee. He invited a few lady friends for a drive, but as he was slightly intoxicated, they declined the offer and he set off with the driver. Camp overlooks Tralee Bay, the destination of the 'Aud' carrying arms for the Rising, and was under special watch by the R.I.C., a fact of which Sam was entirely unaware. He knew that an old friend and co-religionist - George Neazer, who was shot in the Tan war by the I.R.A. - was sergeant in charge of the local station and, on being accosted by a police constable on the strand, thought he would have a joke and at worst be brought along to meet his friend George Neazer. The constable asked him who he was. "I am Lord Northcliffe's son", he replied. "What are you doing here?" was the next question. "Looking for a site for a lager beer factory" was Sam's answer. He was at once placed under arrest and brought to the police station where he discovered, to his horror, that his friend had been transferred shortly before. He was kept overnight in the station and conveyed next day under heavy escort to Tralee jail. He managed to get a message

to the local Protestant minister, Canon Foley, who at once visited him and heard his story. The Canon promised that he would do what he could and returned next day. Meanwhile, he had been in touch with the police and had been told, of course, of Sam's association with Austin Stack, of the letter which was found in Stack's house in which he mentioned that he was looking forward to meeting him at Easter, of his presence with a car on the strand overlooking the bay where the 'Aud' had been hovering about before being scuttled.

Standing at the door of his cell the Canon, in a solemn voice, said "Sam, you deceived me yesterday. You are deeper in this than you led me to believe. Stack will be hanged, Sam, and you too will be hanged and you deserve it for the company you have been keeping". Sam informed me that after the Canon's departure he sat in his cell and cried when he realised the predicament in which he had landed himself and the strength of the evidence against him.

Handcuffed to John Byrne, Creamery manager, Ballymacelligott, he was conveyed to Richmond Barracks, Dublin, from whence he was deported to Wakefield Prison.

Having told me his story, he asked if I thought there would be any use in writing to his former employer, "Bobby Fitz", as he was known locally. I thought it might help and actually drafted a letter which he copied and dispatched to Tralee. The reply came quickly and was rather startling for poor Sam. Mr. Fitzgerald stated: "I can understand the actions of men like Stack, but for you there is no excuse. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to be one of the firing party at your execution". Sam made the best of it and was from then on a Sinn Féiner. He turned to his old habit of joking and was one of the most light-hearted prisoners among us. But his humour was still a source of trouble. While sweeping a corridor, he noticed a Galway prisoner carrying a large bundle of sheets

which a warder was distributing amongst the cells. Sam could not resist the temptation of putting the brush between his legs, sending him sprawling with the sheets. He was, of course, locked up at once.

He had been attending Sunday service in the prison, but feeling rather lonely for his fellow prisoners, he said to me one Sunday morning: "I will go to Mass with you today". I said all right and as we entered the Church a warder shouted "Rew-tell" - this was how the English warders pronounced his name - "you aren't a R.C. Get back to the kitchen and help to get the breakfast for those who are going to Communion".

We were transferred to Frongoch and there Sam was the same light-hearted prisoner. When the first batch of prisoners left the Camp under a big military escort to go before the Advisory Committee in London we did not know their destination. They were away for some days and Sam wrote a letter purporting to come from one of the prisoners, explaining that they had been tried by courtmartial and sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment including life sentences but that the alleged writer was lucky enough to have been freed. A letter then was a matter of great interest and as Sam read he was surrounded by several prisoners, including a number of Galway men. The letter wound up "God help the poor Galway men". It was taken very seriously. Another of Sam's jokes was to spread a report that an order had come that the camp was to be whitewashed twice a year. After his release Sam got a cordial welcome home and, with Sinn Féin influence, was appointed local rate collector against a strong opponent.

Signed: Michael Knightly
(Michael Knightly)

Date: 27/4/53
27.4.53

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

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