

W.S. 671
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21

BURO STAIRÉ MILÉATA 1913-21

No. W.S. 671

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 671

Witness

Patrick Rankin,
Nicholastown,
Kilcullen,
Co. Kildare.

Identity.

Member of Irish Volunteers, Derry, 1915-1916.

O/C. Newry Brigade 1919-1920.

Subject.

National and military activities
Counties Down and Armagh, 1917-1920.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT BY PADDY RANKIN,

Nicholastown, Kilcullen, Co. Kildare.

In September, 1917, I got a notification that an I.R.B. meeting was to be held in Newry in an effort to get that organisation going again. Seamus Dobbyn who represented the Supreme Council of the I.R.B., attended this meeting which was held on the Dublin road about one mile from Newry. The following attended the meeting: Seamus Dobbyn, Robert Kelly, John Southwell and myself. It was agreed that I should act as I.R.B. Centre for County Down and County Armagh; that John Southwell was to assist me for County Armagh, and that Robert Kelly was to assist me for County Down.

General Election, December 1918.

The Down and Armagh Brigade assembled at Newry on the morning of the General Election and marched out the Omeath road along the Newry Canal to Carlingford where our men took up various positions about the town of Carlingford, protecting the various roads to the polling stations where there was some opposition to Sinn Féin supporters from the opposing candidate's supporters. Our men carried hurling sticks which were needed as the day later proved.

During our stay in Carlingford our men were supplied with food by the Newry Cumann na mBan who had travelled there with us. The work of the Cumann na mBan on that day was most efficient and creditable.

There were several little battles where our supporters - men and women - were attacked with forks of various makes. We got the upper hand of these disturbers after a little time and the work of the Volunteers in Carlingford proved the worth of training, obedience to orders and discipline when dealing with mobs out to carry all before them by rowdyism. We were able to ensure that no person was prevented from recording his vote during all that day.

After the polling booths had closed our men and girls marched back again to Newry. On our journey back some hostile people attacked some of our men from Burren in Co. Down and from Warrenpoint whilst they were waiting in the boat at Omeath to cross the Lough from Omeath to Warrenpoint. When we returned to Newry some of our Volunteers had to travel to various parts of South Down and South Armagh.

When a person thinks of the miles covered to and from Carlingford on that day, the thought springs up of the spirit and endurance of our young men and women who marched over twenty-five miles from their homes to Carlingford and back in addition to their very strenuous duties during the day protecting the voters and maintaining law and order.

Attempted Capture of Newtownhamilton Barracks, February 1920:

This attempt was made by Volunteer Units from both Down and Armagh. The idea was to attempt to gain an entry to the Barracks by a ruse. A small number of men, dressed and equipped as British soldiers, sought admission on the plea that they were a military raiding party. The police inside refused to open the door and the attempt was called off.

On our return towards Newry after this affair was called off, I had a number of men and boys with me. We were all armed, when near Newry we were most careful, and every few Volunteers were spaced about fifty yards from those before and following. I had a feeling of danger after leaving Newtownhamilton as some of our boys were young and being armed might be inclined to use their arms if met by R. I. C. and questioned. I impressed on them that if stopped and questioned by R. I. C. they should state that they were returning from a céille at Whitecross which was near us. Near Millvale, Bessbrook, I heard R. I. C. challenging some of our boys in front as to where they were coming from. The answer was "a céille at Whitecross". The R. I. C. men jokingly replied "we hope you all had a good night". As each body of cyclists passed the police they answered "coming from the céille" and passed on.

Raid for Arms at Ballyedmond Castle.

Early in 1918 there came a report from Liverpool via Dublin to our Brigade that there were arms stored in Ballyedmond Castle. The report was accompanied by plans of the interior and the exterior of the Castle, showing where the arms were. After a full examination of the plans by our officers we were to return the plans to G. H. Q. in Dublin by the usual secret route. We returned the plans and they got as far as Dundalk. The man who received them in Dundalk was a well-known Volunteer and he kept the plans in his possession for several days. By ill luck he was stopped by an R. I. C. man in Dundalk in connection with some other little thing and the R. I. C. man discovered the plans of Ballyedmond Castle on him. This was a severe blow to us as it gave warning to the British and ample time to remove all the arms and other war

material that was in Ballyedmond Castle. It would have been a simple matter to raid the Castle owing to its isolated position on the coastline and to capture all the great store of stuff that was in the place. The Dundalk Volunteer who was found with the plans got some months in jail.

Our Brigade had been making preparations for a raid on the Castle from 1918 onwards. We obtained all the information possible about the place and the movements of the inmates. All our collected information was transmitted to G.H.Q. and their sanction obtained for the raid.

On the week previous to the raid, Frank Aiken and I cycled to Ballyedmond and we viewed the exterior of the Castle and its surroundings to make ourselves acquainted with all the local features that would be useful to know in carrying out the raid.

We planned to attack the Castle on the 2nd August, 1919. We had support from Co. Armagh, Co. Louth and Co. Down. Some men came a long way to help us which showed brotherly feelings held by Volunteers of the various centres showing that distance was no obstacle to the Volunteers.

When we arrived near the vicinity of the Castle all persons met by our men were taken into custody as a safety measure against alarming the British Authorities. Several of our men who lived near the Castle, including Peter Murney, were also taken into custody and detained till the raid was called off. This move prevented any blame being attached to those who were treated by us as dangerous. All the people detained by us were released at the end of the raid when the majority of our men had departed for their homes.

Our Newry men were not idle. They went to the

Dominican Church, Queen Street, for confession on Saturday evening and it was a great and edifying sight to see so many making their peace with God. Our arrangements were that all our men were to be at Ballyedmond Castle that - Saturday - evening at 11 p.m.; that they would travel to the Castle cycling in small numbers so that they would not cause any suspicion. As the relays of men on bikes would have mostly to pass Warrenpoint and Rostrevor, our men took quite a lot of side roads which saved a lot of bother. We got all to our objective without any interference from the police which speaks well for our men's discipline (and good luck). Some of them in the raid on Ballyedmond crossed Carlingford Lough from the Co. Louth side by boats. These were all Louth men.

There was an old motor van which we procured on loan, taken to Ballyedmond that night to carry away any material we might capture. This van was driven by the late Peter Shields R.I.P. The van had a devilish habit of making loud noises and unnecessary stoppages on the road from time to time. When it stopped any passengers had to get out and push for some distance whilst Peter would remain at the wheel. I cycled from Newry to Ballyedmond going but returning home I travelled in the van with Peter. I will never forget that trip either. It was nearly 5 a.m. when we reached Hill Street. When we reached Hill Street Peter told me to open an entrance gate to a yard where he was parking the van as he could not leave the trottle or the engine would stop. Whilst I was doing this the noise the van made was dreadful and should have awakened the whole town. It was a good job for Peter and I that every local person was such good sleepers.

When we arrived at the Castle our men cut all telephone wires connecting the Castle to Kilkeel and Rostrevor Police

Barracks. Frank Aiken took charge of a lot of picked men to surround the Castle and to put all persons encountered under guard until the proceedings were over. We were prepared for hard work especially as we required sledges and hammers as we found in the Castle a cellar which appeared to have been lately covered and found to have a hollow sound. So four men got to work on it and although the work was hard we got through to the cellar to find it empty.

On Monday of Easter Week 1920, I was called to a meeting of Brigade Commandants. Michael Collins was in charge of the meeting. Orders were issued at this meeting to burn all Excise and Custom Offices on Good Friday, 1920. Before I went from the meeting Michael Collins told me to call the next day - Tuesday - on my return journey to Newry to Seamus MacGuill, Dundalk, and tell MacGuill to go to Dublin on the next day - Wednesday - for his orders. On Tuesday I called at MacGuill's Bar at the Market Square, Dundalk. MacGuill was not there, so I sent a message to his home and when I waited a few hours for him to come to me, and I then went to his home, and on my journey there had to pass an R.I.C. Barracks, I found him in bed, sick. I told him the message I got for him from Collins - that he was to travel to Dublin to get his orders the next day.

The next time I met MacGuill was on my arrival in Derry Prison some days later. He was in the prison when I arrived there. When I saw him the thought came into my mind that if MacGuill had not been sick and attended the meeting of Brigade officers in Dublin on Easter Monday, both he and myself might not have been in prison. I always felt that my journey to MacGuill's residence coming from Dublin on that Tuesday directed the attention of the R.I.C. to both of us.

On the night of Holy Thursday, 1920, I went to bed about midnight and was sound asleep when an R. I. C. man rapped at my bedroom door about 1 a.m. Good Friday. He pushed the door open as I was awaking and said "Police on duty". I was naturally surprised at his entrance to our house without hearing the noise. This particular policeman looked friendly for which I was thankful. I learned later that the police had forced the lock on the door after my father had refused to admit them. For some time before this I had been expecting a raid and I had lost some sleep as a result. The policeman stepped to one side and the R. I. C. District Inspector for the Newry district came into my bedroom along with a man in plus-fours who had an unpleasant appearance. This man must have served as a soldier in some hot country for his face was all furrowed with lines nearly 14 inches long. He looked like the devil himself. The District Inspector was the reverse as he looked calm and a gentleman. The District Inspector and "plus-fours" were now the only police in my bedroom. My wife and a baby were also in the bed. After searching my room "plus-fours" asked the District Inspector would he search my wife in bed. The District Inspector addressed me "What age is the child?". I said about three weeks. My wife showed them the child and the District Inspector told "plus-fours" "We will not bother her". "Plus-fours" was not pleased at this. This incident showed me that the District Inspector was the superior officer and was in authority and I was thanking God for that. Whilst this search was going on my wife had a letter concealed on her person in the bed concerning the Head of the police force in Belfast and if "plus-fours" had searched my wife he would have got it, and he would have returned to Belfast a success and might have earned his promotion and

perhaps death to poor Paddy (myself).

All the time other police were busy searching throughout our house, searching every little crevice for anything that they might charge me with and obtain a conviction. My father, from the time the first police forced their way into the house, was engaged in giving them all sorts of salutations but I was too much occupied in my bedroom to hear all his hard remarks. After some time the police and their officers departed and I went to the front door with them. They said, "Good-morning" to me, and I answered them likewise and to myself said "Thanks be to God". I then tried to close the front door but could not. I stooped down to investigate and found that some object was keeping the door from closing. My hand found a boot and I tried to move it. Then I moved up my hand and I found a leg - it was human. I got up from my stooped position and stood erect. The front door was pushed open. It was "plus-fours" who had put his foot inside the front door after saying "good-morning" to me. He was expecting me to say something to my wife about the police being gone. He was disappointed if he expected to overhear any remarks from me. He took a hold of my shoulder, saying "Come along with me". I said, "This is short notice. What do you want? Can I have time for something to eat?". He answered, "We will give you something to eat. What time do you want?". I said, "Fifteen minutes". He replied, "Seven. I will give you seven minutes".

I said goodbye to my wife and family and taking a few articles with me I left my home with my escort "plus-fours" and the District Inspector and a number of police who had surrounded my house, front and back. I was brought on foot to Canal Street Barracks, Newry, and given some bread and tea whilst waiting there. About 2.30 a.m., I was put

into a canvas covered motor tender, the end being open. I sat between an R.I.C. man, armed with a rifle, who acted as a man towards me, and a sergeant on the other side. It was a case of between "the devil and the deep sea". "Plus-fours" sat with the driver in the front seat. A canvas cover or curtain separated us from the men in the front seats. A stiff breeze was blowing past us and through us in the back. This breeze would not prevent the men in front hearing any conversation between us behind. The sergeant opened the conversation, after we travelled a few miles on the Belfast road, by saying, "I have asked to be your escort as my people live in Moville and you might be going to Derry Prison". Very nice indeed but I am not to be caught by this serpent. I replied, "He's a good man who doesn't forget his people". After this there was silence until we travelled a few miles further, and the sergeant tried his hand again and asked me if I was in Dublin lately. I said "No" (but I was). After this there were no further questions asked. Soon we arrived in Belfast and thence to Victoria Military Barracks. There I was put into a guardroom cell. It was in a dreadful dirty state as if some prisoner had lately vacated it. No ventilation and I examined it well. The little peep hole in the door was minus glass and it seemed to be used by prisoners for the getting of cigarettes and matches into the cell. Whilst examining the interior of the cell further I was startled by a loud voice calling out from the guardroom "How are you, Paddy?". I looked through the peep hole into the guardroom and saw a soldier in uniform. He was a sergeant. My first thought was, here is another man going to the land of the O'Friel's to see his people. However, this man is in khaki. I said, "you have the advantage of me". He said, "Do you not know me? You and I were at school together".

I was not yet convinced. He tried again. "Do you not remember playing four corners in Newry; Kelly, Belton and McClorey. Do you mind us getting eels in the Fiddle river beside Ann O'Rourke's Bridge and selling them in North Street for a penny each and buying honeycomb for the proceeds?". I said, "You have won. You are a soldier and a man and you for one are not trying to trap me". I then asked him where he had been. He told me he had been all over the world and through the 1914-1918 War.

I bade my soldier friend goodbye and I am sorry that I did not meet him since.

Later that Saturday evening I was brought by an English soldier escort from Victoria Barracks across the city to the Northern Counties Railway en route to Derry. Whilst going through the station which was crowded with train passengers and their baggage, mostly composed of golf requisites, etc., one railway porter came very quickly towards my escort pushing a heavy railway parcel truck, and by a good stroke of tactics he was able to separate my escort and me with his truck and he handed me a large packet of cigarettes. The military officer in charge of the escort saw the quick move and smiled, "You can't beat the Irish for quick tactics. Good luck, porter!".

On getting into the train, accompanied by my escort of a few soldiers in charge of a sergeant, the officer travelled in another compartment. He was young and acted as a gentleman and officer should. He gave me tea and refreshments three times on the journey to Derry, which he paid for. He was very kind to me. After our arrival in Derry my escort conveyed me to the prison.

On the journey to Derry I asked the sergeant of my

escort would he do me a little favour. He said, "What is it?". I asked him if he would look into the other carriages on the train when it stopped at the next station and see if any R.I.C. were travelling on the train. The sergeant said he would, and at several stops he got out on the platform and inspected the carriages from the guard's van to the engine and reported back to me that there was not an R.I.C. man on the train. I thanked him for his kindness and consideration to a prisoner. This proves that the R.I.C. Sergeant travelling with me from Newry to Belfast was only fooling his prisoner with a motive behind his fooling.

Derry Prison is horse-shoe shaped. The shape of the prison enabled us prisoners to talk across to each other from the sides of the horse-shoe after we were locked up at night. Whilst I was there an old man was brought in. He was about 70 years of age and every day he was complaining about his absence from his old home, his little wife and family and his little farm of land. We all tried to cheer him up by telling him he would soon be out of prison. But no good. We were all young men and he must have felt very lonely amongst us, poor man. His case was strange indeed. Some time earlier at his home, his house was surrounded by R.I.C. - think they were I.R.A. men looking for arms. He would not open the door for the R.I.C. Instead he got his shotgun and fired out, badly wounding some of the R.I.C. who were taken to hospital. For the man's safety the R.I.C. arrested him and put him into Derry Prison until the R.I.C. men got out of danger from their wounds.

Whilst in Derry all prisoners could travel about the interior of the prison and converse with each other, which was very good for all of us and it kept our spirits up. Sometimes we could get a letter smuggled out to our friends.

without it being censored by the Prison Authorities. We were allowed to receive food and parcels from our homes which provided a welcome break in the prison routine. After being some weeks in Derry a Sub-Head Officer came into the prison and informed us that he had good news for a few of us. He mentioned six names.

This was a Saturday morning and we were to be ready to leave the prison at 3 p.m. with all our belongings packed up. This officer was asked if it was true that the six men whose names were mentioned were going home. He said "It was. Wasn't I always a good friend to you prisoners?". Later, some of us thought him a good officer, others of us thought otherwise.

So we six got ready. All our fellow prisoners told us to tell their friends at home that all were well in Derry. That evening we were brought out by the Head Warden and as we passed into the Prison Square there were about 12 R. I. C. and a sergeant, all armed, waiting. This seemed normal to us as prisoners were coming into Derry regularly and those R. I. C. might be the escort for incoming men. After we collected our parcels of food from home from the prison office, we six stood for a few minutes on the Square talking about our good luck in getting home. A sergeant in charge of the 12 R. I. C. came over and said to the Head Warden who was standing with us, "Are those the six prisoners for me?". This was a surprise for us and we knew the worst. This Head Warden came from Maryborough district and was enjoying himself fooling us and also fooling the prisoners left behind in Derry. England could never have held our country only for the help of such renegades as Moriarty.

We were put on a train at Derry and arrived at

Belfast Station, around by the coastline, passing through Ballymena, the train lifted a crowd of footballers who were also travelling to Belfast. When we arrived in Belfast the police escort put us six prisoners into a motor tender. Immediately we were in the tender a volley of stones was thrown at us by the footballers and we lay down in the tender for safety and our escort got most of the blows. Those footballers had a peculiar idea of clean sportsmanship. How did they get the stones? After this mob was cleared we started in the tender and arrived at Belfast Docks. There was a boat there and we were marched up the gangway. On the boat I saw a Mr. Adams, a draper from Newry, and his lady Secretary, a Miss Millikin, also from Newry. Both those people differed from me in creed and politics but they were nothing the worse for that as events proved.

We six prisoners were put into a first-class cabin as all the other bunks were occupied by passengers. We were treated as gentlemen prisoners for once. Our 12 R. I. C. acting as our escorts, had to remain on deck to guard us. There was also an escort of English soldiers who sat outside our cabin, and their officer an Englishman. When the waiter came along with his napkins, trays, etc. we had a great treat at the expense of the English military officer. But to hear the comments of our military escort (it was great). They had to eat bully beef and the prisoners seemed to be treated as gentlemen.

Whilst we were in the cabin an R. I. C. man came down to our cabin and asked for Paddy Rankin. He had a parcel of fruit for me from Mr. Adams. This was very kind of Mr. Adams and showed a fine christian friendship towards one who differed from him in everything. His thoughtfulness

showed courage - moral courage - indeed. If he had been of my own creed he would have been afraid to show that he knew me. He and his lady friend went short of their fruit on the voyage for me. This was the spirit of James Hope, Henry Joy McCracken and William Orr of old.

After arriving at Whitehaven, a coal-mining district, we entrained for London and arrived there at 3 p.m. on a Sunday evening in a dense fog which became worse by the time we arrived in Wormwood Scrubbs Prison where we were welcomed by a number of fellow Irish prisoners, some of them having been in prison for years and having underwent several little hunger-strikes. We were only in the prison for about an hour when a fellow prisoner came to tell us that there was to be a general strike of all the prisoners in the Scrubbs Prison and that we six were to take a vote and be ready for the strike the next morning - Monday. Three of our six were for the strike with the majority of the other prisoners, and three against. The going on strike was adjourned to Wednesday. We therefore had a rest eating all our good things before the battle. It seemed quite a change to have the British Authorities uncertain of what was coming. The Prison Authorities and the warden staff were expecting another little stunt by those Irishmen going on strike as usual for only a few days and then the trouble would die out. Those warders, all Englishmen, could not visualise a fight to a finish. Orders arrived from Dublin to stop the rut that existed in Wormwood Scrubbs. Imagine Irish prisoners arriving in the Scrubbs each day with bad wearing apparel, bad boots, etc to be met by an Irish prisoner who had spent over two years in the prison, having two or three suits of clothes, several pairs of shoes, collars, ties and underclothing galore. There were many people showing bad example to

others by falling for such glamour. Those people give me the same repugnance as the uneducated returned Yankee who was attempting to impress the natives. Such conduct caused some of the warders to be laughing up their sleeves at us and was killing the morale of our Irish prisoners. Some of the persons I am referring to were expected to break the hunger-strike.

On the Wednesday the strike took effect with about fifty of our Irish prisoners abstaining from participation. The reason those men gave was that several former strikes had only lasted for an average of five days and achieved nothing. So may be the fifty men had some excuse and perhaps they were right.

After the start of the strike the warders and the prisoners not on strike moved about the prison as was usual but the warders now went around mostly in company with our abstaining from hunger-strike prisoners, joking at us, to their discredit I am sorry to say, doing the dirty work for England if it continued only for one week. The warders ignored the men on strike.

For about one week on strike our men kept together, giving each fellow striker all the encouragement to continue and none of the strikers showed any disposition to break the strike. The warders each day gave out better and more attractive food than that supplied the previous day - high-class foods of various kinds and different varieties of fruit extracts, etc. Those attempts at tempting us made our men more determined to keep away from the food which each day became a greater temptation.

About this period - when the strike was on for a week - the fifty non-strikers expressed sorrow for their conduct and came on hunger strike with us. This was a great

victory for Ireland and put an end to a situation that was likely to destroy the morale of those participating in the hunger strike as well as the men not on strike. The warders were furious at the fifty new hunger-strikers joining us as they were hoping that the fifty non-strikers would break the strike. When those new men went on strike they got nothing but abuse from the warders. We were now going well and feeling full of grit.

Our officers gave an order which was to take effect one evening at 7 p.m. When our Commandant would blow a whistle each prisoner was to pull his cell door off its hinges. Some of our men were now getting weak and not strong enough for this job, so an extra prisoner was detailed to help a weak prisoner to get his door off. As the fifty men who later went on strike were still feeling fit they proved very useful in getting all the doors off. They were detailed to move along the corridors and help anywhere their assistance was necessary. It only took about five minutes to complete the work and have each door off its hinges. There was some noise when hundreds of iron doors fell on to stone corridors.

The alarm was sounded and armed military rushed in with the warders and other officials. There were three flights of iron stairs in the prison. Each prisoner lay in his bed awaiting whatever action the Prison Authorities decided on taking. We had not long to wait. Each prisoner was ordered to carry away his bedclothes and mattress to the ground floors. We did not get time to walk; we were showed down the iron stairs to the ground floor corridor as it was the only place where cell doors were intact. Just imagine five or six prisoners were now put into one cell. There was no other place vacant for us. Our health

was not going to be improved under those conditions. The military were very abusive and used their rifle butts on any prisoners who refused to give sheep-like obedience. Many of us received severe blows from them. In our ground floor cells we were packed like cattle - no room, poor ventilation, overcrowded floor space. The warders came along to each cell, opened the door and passed in the food to the various prisoners, who in turn would pitch the food back into the corridor. The warders would then call the military guards. They would come with their rifles and strike at the prisoners with the butts, whilst the warders were collecting the remains of the food to be thrown into the cells again and close and lock the cell doors. Our men now broke the glass peep-hole in each cell window and put the food through it out into the corridor again. The state of our cells soon became dreadful especially the floors which became embedded with soup, fish, fruit, rice and various other foods, and men continually walking in same. Those conditions were bound to bring the hunger strike to a speedy climax. Each morning the prisoners could walk outside in the prison grounds and the fresh air was good. Whilst we walked in our reserved part we could see other prisoners walking around their own paths, some of them doing life imprisonment. One of those poor fellows had only one leg. He was a poor sight to look at. He was probably one of the unfortunates of England's latest war.

After ten days in a cell with four other prisoners a military doctor and a R.A.M.C. military orderly came in to our cell to examine us. The doctor held one hand on his nose and cursed the smell of the cell. He hardly took time to look at us prisoners. The orderly had his senses about him and called attention to, for instance, one prisoner who he claimed had bad eyes. The doctor and his orderly came to

see us three days in succession and the same routine was gone through including the doctor's curses. This orderly had a fine sense of duty and insisted in directing attention to ailing hunger-strikers. I was one in which the orderly had his way, and I was examined. My fellow prisoners in the cell must have looked healthy as he ignored them. At one o'clock a warder opened the door of our cell and called me by number and told me to be ready at three o'clock. At 3 o'clock I went out to the corridor on the ground floor, which was a very long passage, and at the end of it were two officials calling on me to come to them. I hesitated and sat down on a form at the ablution as I did not know what was in store for me. They asked me could I walk and I signed to them "No". So they came along to meet me and both linked me by each arm along the corridor to the exit where there were several large ambulances full of my fellow prisoners. I was put into one which held about nine beds and in comfort. After some delay a signal was given. The ambulances proceeded through several gates, each gate being closed before the next one was opened and then we were outside the prison. After we left the precincts of the prison we all cheered. After we proceeded two hundred yards when our convoy was halted. Dismay! We were all taken back to the interior of the prison again. You can imagine our thoughts. We had forgotten one prisoner. This man was got and put into an ambulance and our convoy proceeded through the gates as before, but once outside it was for good this time.

Our convoy proceeded through the city to St. James' Infirmary, Chapham. This was a large hospital which included apartments for children, men and women. When we arrived at the hospital our men were put into a ward which

held twenty-five men quite comfortably. This was a big change indeed. We were immediately put to bed, in charge of two nurses and several laymen orderlies and a doctor. My condition was bad and I was the first to be attended to. A screen was put up around my bed and the doctor performed a minor operation on me which took him about ten minutes. This operation was to me a blessing in disguise and the hunger strike was the means of probably saving my life as at home each two months I had to go to a local doctor, with most indifferent results. Each patient was given milk and eggs for a start. No prisoner required any pumps due to stomach trouble. The hospital staff were very kind and thoughtful to our men.

After one week in hospital our first Sunday for visitors came and it was a godsend. The doctor's orders were that very few visitors be allowed into the wards at a time and that the visitors should get in in relays so that there would be no congestion at any time. But the first visitors remained on chatting with us all and in a short time with visitors constantly arriving the ward got packed with young men and women of the London-Irish and of the Irish population in London. Some of our visitors carried large bags. Some of those bags from appearance could tell some history for they seemed to have come perhaps fifty years previously to London with some Irish emigrant. The spirit of all our visitors, men and women, who thronged the ward was a Heaven-sent blessing to us and none of us was forgotten by our kind visitors. Each of us got as much food from the visitors as would last for a month. The doctor became alarmed that we would overeat in our delicate state of health but he was needlessly alarmed as he did not know the capabilities of an Irishman's stomach. We had to use all our Irish guile to prevail on

him not to stop future visitors on Sundays. The good cheerful talk of our Irish visitors was better for us than any doctor's medicine.

After a few weeks in hospital we were getting into the convalescent stage when two young Cork patients had a brain wave. They asked our doctor - Doctor McCormick - a Scotsman - would he give them a pass out to see London. He said he would have to acquaint his committee and get their permission. A few days later the doctor came along with two passes for the Cork boys, made out as effective from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Corkmen went out and to their credit returned back in correct order. After this Dr. McCormick was kept busy as each day our men got passes to visit places in London and their friends there. So when the first men who were on hunger strike and received hospital treatment were better, we had a conference and decided to pack up and leave the hospital for good with our passes. There was an old man who objected to our plan. He said it would be shameful to leave before waiting for the remainder of the fifty men who were one week behind us in starting the strike and were enduring a longer strike by not joining us at the start. The men in our first batch had only to do from ten to fourteen days' hunger-strike but the fifty men on the second batch had to do up to twenty-eight days on hunger-strike. Old Culligan's plea "that unity was strength" did not carry much weight as our batch felt that the later batch of strikers should have come in with us at the very start. Culligan lost his case. Our men departed from London for Ireland to the various counties and their homes. We expected to be stopped in Holyhead but no, nor were we interfered with by R.I.C. in any part of Ireland on our journey home.

Before I conclude these memoirs, I would like to make a few additions which I overlooked at the time I was dealing with them above. I feel that future historians should know of two Newry men who did not forget their Irish heritage when the occasion demanded proper action.

(a) The Sergeant in the Royal Irish Rifles who befriended me in Victoria Barracks, Belfast.

This man's name was Sergeant Joseph Cullen. His father was a watchmaker living in St. Mary's Street, Newry. That morning in Victoria Barracks he told me about my charge sheet which he had received from 'Plus Fours' after my arrival when I was being handed over to the military authorities. He also gave me notepaper, envelopes and a pencil to write home.

(b) Wormwood Scrubbs - George Cahill

When I arrived in Wormwood Scrubbs, I soon found that there was a Newry man already there. George Cahill was this man's name. He belonged to our little group of I.R.B. men. He had been about 2 years a prisoner in the Scrubbs when I arrived there. He was a carpenter by trade. I would not like to finish this narrative without mentioning his name.

The following were the six prisoners who arrived in Wormwood Scrubbs from Derry Prison and who were asked an hour after their arrival to declare by vote for or against a hunger-strike :

Seamus McGuill, Dundalk
P.J. Ward, Donegal
James Kavanagh, R.I.P., Derry
Seán O'Neill, R.I.P., Belfast.
Hugh McManus, Enniskillen
Paddy Rankin, Newry.

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Signed : Patrick Rankin
(Patrick Rankin).

Date : 16/4/52.

Witness: Patrick Quinn (Patrick Quinn).