

The

CAPTIVE VOICE



An Glór Gafa

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The Voice of Irish Republican Prisoners of War

OPERATION TOLLAN



The CAPTIVE VOICE

An Glór Gafa

The Captive Voice/An Glór Gafa is a quarterly magazine written in its entirety by Irish Republican POWs currently being held in Ireland, England, Europe and the US. It is published by Sinn Féin's POW Department.

Irish republicans have always recognised that resistance to British misrule does not end upon their arrest. The battles to be fought and the tactics to be employed may change but the enemy remains the same. In the words of our comrade Bobby Sands:

"The jails are engineered to crush the political identity of the captured republican prisoner, to crush his/her resistance and transform him/her into a systemised answering-machine with a large criminal tag stamped by oppression upon his/her back, to be duly released on to the street, politically cured — politically barren — and permanently broken in spirit."

The establishment of this jail journal is a tribute not only to our families, friends and comrades, whose strength and support have been inspirational to us all, but also is a

clear recognition that we are what we are — political prisoners, unbroken in our deep-rooted desire for freedom.

The Captive Voice affords us a platform and an opportunity to present in print our views on those topics and issues which affect daily life both inside and outside of the jails. The magazine contains political analyses of current national and international affairs, culture, short stories, poetry and the latest updates on prison-related campaigns and issues. Satire and humour can also be found within the special features, cartoons and artwork illustrations.

We have been pleased and greatly encouraged by the response to the magazine. It is hoped that the sharing of our feelings and experiences through the pages of *An Glór Gafa* will be both beneficial and enjoyable for all our readers.

We are determined that our message and our captive voice shall be heard by many.

— The Irish Republican Prisoners of War. ■

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We welcome correspondence with ideas, suggestions or comments on the contents of *The Captive Voice/An Glór Gafa* or on any subject of concern to prisoners.

WRITE TO: Micheál Mac Giolla Ghunna or Paddy O'Dowd, H-Blocs, Long Kesh, County Antrim.

The

CAPTIVE VOICE



An Glór Gafa

THIS ISSUE of *An Glór Gafa* is a very special one. It outlines in unprecedented detail, the story of the recent escape bid from the H-Blocks and its aftermath. It is a tribute to all those who played a part in this operation and also those who created the conditions for it over many years.

Although unsuccessful in terms of getting people out of jail, the tunnel was a huge success in other respects. The engineering feat involved in constructing a 90-foot tunnel, extending beyond the perimeter wall of H7 was a victory for the ingenuity, unity of purpose and indeed raw physical courage of those involved; and for the republican structures of our jail community within which such qualities are nurtured. In addition, the very existence of the tunnel shattered whatever remnants might have remained of Britain's tattered criminalisation policy, and sent a clear message around the world that not only does Britain continue to hold captive prisoners of war, but that those prisoners of war remain undefeated.

If the escape bid highlighted the calibre and political nature of the POWs involved, then its aftermath highlighted something about the nature of Britain's approach to the issue of political prisoners. First they used the catch-all "ongoing security operation" to cover up the withdrawal of prisoners' rights and facilities — visits stopped, mail held up, education facilities suspended and all republican prisoners held in solitary confinement. Then the most reactionary and sectarian elements were allowed to take control of the H-Blocks and give vent to their petty and vindictive instincts. Finally, riot squads were sent in to attack and violently strip naked republican POWs. The message was clear, if you try to escape and smash the facade of normality in the Six Counties, expect retribution and revenge.

However, the same qualities which underpinned the construction of the tunnel also enabled republican POWs to withstand this onslaught. British vindictiveness and violence could not overcome republican comradeship and resistance. And so, undaunted we continue the normal activities of prisoners of war, albeit under constrained conditions. The structures of our community remain intact, our political and educational work is ongoing, this magazine continues to be written and, no doubt brains are already being taxed with the possibilities for a further escape bid.

While we remain optimistic and forward-looking, we are however saddened by the death of our comrade, Pat Kelly. Ultimately he could not escape the tragic consequences of ill-treatment in an English jail. Deanaimid comhbhróno chroí lena chéile Angela agus a gclann.

LAOCH AR LAR

PAT KELLY was born and brought up in Garrynacum, Killenard, County. Laois. From an early age he worked on the family farm and then as a lorry driver, setting up his own small haulage business. He worked far and wide including spells in America and on the continent. He was also something of a fitness fanatic and a lover of country music. Pat could quite easily have ignored the 'Troubles' in the North. However, from an early age he was eager to learn about Britain's involvement in Ireland and became deeply concerned at the plight of his fellow Irish people in the Six Counties. He came to believe that he had a duty to do something about this and he became an active republican.

Pat was very conscious about his own security and kept a very low profile in his native Laois where many local republicans did not know of his connections. He moved up into the Border area, engaging in countless operations against the British. His enthusiasm for the fight, his courage in the face of danger and his sense of humour gained him great respect among many republicans who were to become life-long friends and comrades. In particular, he became accepted by that very close-knit republican community in South Armagh as one of their own. Unfortunately, security considerations prevent a full description of Pat's work for the Republican Movement. However, his ingenuity, quick thinking and sense of humour extricated him and his comrades out of many a tricky situation.

No task was too great for Pat and he took every opportunity to engage the enemy. His own small business could have made him quite wealthy but his republican activities were always more important to him. When approached to work with the IRA's England Dept, Pat, true to form, did not hesitate. He proved a dedicated Volunteer and an extremely valuable asset in the IRA's England campaign.

In November 1992, Pat was arrested in London in connection with a four-ton bomb found on a lorry apparently destined for the centre of the city. This incident earned Pat the affectionate nickname of 'Four Ton Kelly' while in jail. Sentenced to 25 years, Pat remained unbroken. He met up with comrades in the jails in England and became known for his good nature, staunchness and above all, his craic.

After the IRA ceasefire was announced in August 1994, rather than



experiencing a relaxation in the repressive conditions in existence in the jails in England, republican POWs were to bear the brunt of vindictive British government intent on humiliating defeating them. Michael Howard, the British Home Secretary introduced new draconian measures, increasing strip searches and 'ghostings' from jails to jails and re-introducing 'closed' visits (preventing any physical contact between POWs and their visitors). As a result, by December 1994, Pat and his comrades in Full Sutton Special Secure Unit (SSU) began a non-co-operation protest. By Christmas 1994, while the rest of the world was expecting movement towards a lasting peace in Ireland, Pat was beginning the first of many months of protest in solitary confinement.

In June 1992, prior to his arrest, Pat had been diagnosed and undergone treatment in Ireland for skin cancer. However, while in jail the problem re-occurred. Although it was quite obvious to Pat and his comrades that the cancer was back, the prison authorities appeared reluctant to treat him. During his whole time on protest, Pat suffered the pain with no treatment whatsoever. When he and other comrades were moved to Whitemoor S.S.U. and a further deterioration in conditions, in July 1995, a 'dirty' protest began.

Pat's condition caused increasing concern, but attempts by his solicitor Gareth Pierce and by Fianna Fail TD, Eamonn O Cuiv, to get an outside

consultant in to see him were continually prevented by the British authorities. They demanded that Pat must first 'comply with prison rules' — something he refused to do. Eventually after enormous political and international pressure the British agreed to allow him a medical examination. However, even after cancer was confirmed, the Home Office continued to drag its feet over treatment. Several weeks later Pat was brought, chained and under armed guard, to Peterborough Hospital, where he remained chained to a prison warder throughout. Immediately after the operation, he was returned to Whitemoor Jail's medical wing and then, within days, back to the punishment block in the SSU. He was once again locked in solitary confinement in a cell with no mattress or bed, no water or sanitation, no heating, no reading or writing material and no radio. He was allowed to exercise by himself in the small punishment yard, one hour a day.

Eventually in December 1995, when it was clear that Pat was terminally ill, international opinion was to force the British Government to transfer him first to Maghaberry Jail and then some months later to Portlaoise Jail where his deteriorating condition was to lead to his eventual release.

Pat Kelly died at the home of his long-term partner Angela and family in native Laois, on Wednesday 11 June 1997. Ironically his death co-incidently closely with the anniversary of Michael Gaughan another republican POW who died as a result of force-feeding while on hunger strike in England. Like Michael, Pat died as a result of ill-treatment while in an English jail. We, his comrades, remember Pat for his courage and determination but above all we remember him for his craic, which lifted us when things seemed particularly dark.

Throughout Pat's life and during the worst stages of his time in jail, he remained steadfast to his belief that a real peace in Ireland could only come with an end to British rule and the sectarian Six Counties statelet. The most fitting epitaph for Pat therefore would be for us, his comrades to achieve what he spent all his life attempting to achieve.

Slán, a chara,

Is bocht linn imeacht uainn cara mór agus poblachtach daingean. I measc laochra na nGael go raibh sé.

Deepest sympathy is extended by us all to his partner Angela, his family and the whole family circle

Strategic overview

EVERY PRISONER at one time or another dreams of escape. As republican POWs we do not just have a dream we have a duty. We are guided by three broad objectives:

1. To seek ways of escaping from imprisonment and returning to the struggle;
2. To make the best use of our time in prison to enable us to return to our families and to the struggle as better people;
3. To create the conditions which make the achievement of the first two possible.

The long years of sacrifice and struggle — from the blanket protest and the deaths of ten comrades on hunger-strike, to the battle for segregation, the Great Escape of 1983, through to the conditions campaigns of the late 1980s and 1990s — have created the conditions which allow us to enjoy a quality of life suited to us as long-term political prisoners.

The idea of a tunnel is as old as prison itself. The physical structure and layout of the H-Blocks has always led many to believe that the notion of a tunnel was literally a pipe dream. In particular the Brits and their servants who designed, built and now staff this camp.

In fact it was the case that to successfully achieve as much as we did in March 1997 we had to practically reinforce the myth that a tunnel was just not possible, even among other comrades.

At the same time the actual planning and preparation was underway. We had agreed that H7, due to its proximity to the perimeter wall, was to be the site of the tunnel. 'A' Wing H7 was to be the source of the tunnel. Given that 38 of our comrades had successfully escaped from H7 in 1983, we realised that our own operation would be even more damaging to the enemy in political and propaganda terms. Our intention was to

break the record set in 1983 and to secure the freedom of the maximum number of POWs.

The scale of the operation we were undertaking was clear to us from the outset. It would be a security nightmare. We would have to balance the need to conceal our efforts from the enemy against the need to involve enough men to make the operation practicable. By limiting knowledge of the operation to a small group of POWs in H7 and indeed

within the Camp, we would, as far as was possible, ensure that no abnormal activity on a grand scale among the daily routines would alert the massive human and technical surveillance network employed against us.

This was not and indeed is not a negative reflection on those comrades who remained oblivious to the massive work put into the operation. It is a testament to the discipline of those POWs engaged in the operation and a clear reaffirmation of the importance of a "need to know" policy.

However, all of that was to lie ahead of us. Before we could mount such an operation we had to consult

our comrades on the outside. We required their assistance and back-up. We had to assure them that the obvious security concerns were under control. We had to convince them that we would overcome all of the obstacles which lay in our path and make our way to them. For their part, our comrades in Ogligh na hÉireann gave us their full support.

Once we were satisfied that all of the preparatory work inside and outside was completed we set about organising a timetable.

We were set to move from the theory to the practice. Once we began the series of briefings with the POWs who would form the operational unit there could be no turning back.

In the weeks which followed there were to be many tense moments and heated exchanges. But above all there was an immense sense of pride and confidence. That same spirit of resistance was to predominate in the weeks after the discovery of the tunnel.

Under the direction and guidance of their masters in the NIO elements of prison management and staff eagerly pursued their own sectarian and political agendas — against republican POWs.

Their efforts failed to break, or in any way weaken us. They alone have failed to learn the lessons from the years of sacrifice, struggle and resistance which are the legacy of Long Kesh.

In the following pages, the story of this period is told in the words of those who were the active participants in the events. We face into the future, unified and strong. We remain committed to our objectives and will not be deflected from them.

Beirigi Bua,
Camp Staff,
Ogligh na hÉireann,
H-Blocks.



The Great Escape of 1983

OPERATION TOLLAN

In this article, five of our comrades tell the story of "an tollan" (the tunnel) in their own words

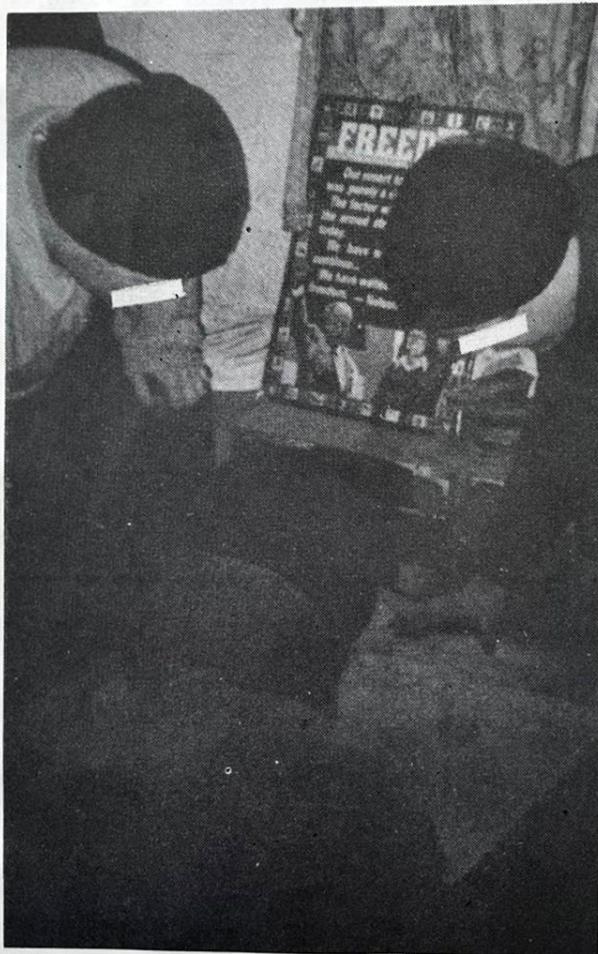
■ THE BRIEFING

COMRADE A

'Will you go to my cell in 2 minutes.' That was my first contact with the project that was to take over almost every conscious moment for the next number of weeks. When I rapped on the cell door, I knew from the voice telling me to come in that this was definitely no ordinary meeting. The five faces which greeted me put me on my metal. This was a serious gathering, some of the most senior men in the camp were sitting around the cell. The atmosphere was friendly but formal. The acting cathaoirleach told me to take a seat and said that we were waiting on three others. That was a relief — if I'm in the shit, I thought, at least I'm not in it on my own. The three lads quickly arrived and looked as puzzled as I felt. As soon as they settled themselves in their chairs, the cathaoirleach went straight to business. He held up a sheet of paper and said, 'As from now there is a; he pointed to the paper — in large letters there was written the word 'TOLLAN', he continued "under construction in Cell 18. You men will help build it. From this moment on security is paramount'.

COMRADE B

I was in shock. My whole body sang with joy — my



heart raced, adrenaline surged through my veins. I was on operational duty. I was escaping — I could join the struggle on the outside again.

COMRADE C

I remember my first

reaction on being briefed — I was stunned and not a little pleased that I was to be part of the operation. I could see a range of emotions playing across the faces of those comrades who also had been briefed along with me. Some

showed disbelief at what they had heard, others adopted a look of seriousness. Then everyone began to give weary grins that grew steadily broader as the enormity of what we were embarking upon sunk in.

As in any operation, security was emphasised as being of paramount importance — the lives of comrades depended upon it. We were all too aware of people's lives being at stake — Oglach Hugh Coney (shot dead by the British Army during a Tunnel escape from Long Kesh in 1974) being the starkest reminder of the kinds of risks involved.

COMRADE A

The cathaoirleach pointed to three men: "These men are in charge. You will take your instructions from them. Any ideas, thoughts, fears etc, discuss them with any one of these men." The three had an impressive track record — if this could be done, these were the ones to do it. "This endeavour has the backing of the Army at the highest level", the cathaoirleach continued: "It is supported and resourced to the hilt. The commitment from the leadership is total." His confidence in the project was infectious. "This will work!" he concluded. That sentence stuck in my head. It was impossible not to believe him. From that day on, those three with overall command



of the operation, became known as "The Three Musketeers".

■ THE ROLES

COMRADE D

On learning that "it" was to begin immediately, a happy, deeply breathed excitement shone on me and all around me. The pleasure of every fantasy, plot, plan and dream. Definitely a case of make love and war, as peace of mind, body and country came within realistic reach. We tried to smile secretly yet mischievously at one another. An atmosphere of volunteering comradeship was prevalent.

The Three Musketeers dished out our roles. Among others I was to take on the waste disposal brief and join the "Noise Abatement Society" — Long Kesh style. The latter entailed drowning out the very distinguishable

noise of getting through 12-14 inches of reinforced concrete — the weapons at our disposal included padding the cell itself and covering any noise at the many enemy positions to which we were vulnerable (in a self-contained H-Block the acoustics are a living nightmare). After the tunnel collapsed, the POA spokesman, Finlay Spratt (or "Pratt", as one reporter accidentally called him) said on TV that one screw had reported hearing suspicious banging coming from H7 six months beforehand. However, in his propaganda exercise, he omitted to say that our block had been searched six weeks prior to the tunnel's discovery.

COMRADE C

Once we were fully briefed on the operation, we were assigned various roles and duties. These included appointing scouts and initiating an early warning

system — measures that were both critical and essential to the success of the operation. The movement of screws within and outside the block, needed to be monitored at all times as they were a constant danger. We also had to acquire materials from the wing which would be needed for the digging of the tunnel.

COMRADE A

The equipment, tools and materials were improvised from every available item. Everything that was utilised or created, whether it was tough or delicate, ingenious or simple — it was always practical and soon became indispensable once its value had been proven.

Skills and talents were also exploited to the full. There were engineers. Electricians, carpenters, labourers, mad scientists and experimenters. Everyone gave their all. People working together would discuss and work out

ways to improve methods and tools. All suggestions, good, bad or mad, were put to the Musketeers. More often than not suggestions and needs were met with the same response: "We have that covered", "we've thought of that one", "that's in the process of being done".

COMRADE B

I was informed by a Musketeer that my brief would be to look after problems of air supply and lighting in the tunnel. Another comrade was also to work on the lighting and I was soon to find out that he was most capable of carrying out this role without any assistance which left me free to carry out my other duties.

■ BREAKING THROUGH

COMRADE C

Finally everything was in

place and the digging of the tunnel could begin in earnest. The cell chosen for the tunnel entrance was Cell 18'A Wing. This was for a number of reasons. Its location was far enough away from the inner perimeter fence surrounding H7 so that any noise generated by the digging would be minimised and not heard by the screws who patrolled around the block or from within the watchtower overlooking H7's A&B yards.

Of course before the tunnel proper could begin, we needed to break through the concrete floor of the cell. A two-foot square area was marked out on the black floor — this was to be our tunnel entrance. But the unknown factor was the depth of the actual concrete.

COMRADE D

Our first few tentative bangs on concrete sent us scurrying: radios blaring in pre-chosen spots; assigned volunteers to listen at vulnerable locations, men in the yard — walking, talking, messing about with a football, playing in the rain, walking in the rain, singing in the rain and even depressed in the rain. If only we knew just how depressing that rain could become — we had to deal with every individual rain drop four times. It fell on us in the yard, dripped on us in the tunnel, soaked into us as we bailed it out and finally we had to furtively dispose of it. The weather people say that we had the driest four months in 300 years, but hidden in such statistics is the fact that we had the wettest February in 200 years — and we can account for every last drop of it!

COMRADE A

Cell 18 became the centre of our universe. Entry was accomplished via a series of warning signals. On entering the cell for the first time the heat took my breath away. The dust was thick in the air and stung the eyes. Once the door was closed, mattresses were pushed into place around it, mattresses also covered the wall from top to



bottom and the window was sealed. Condensation dripped off the walls. The heat reminded me of a sauna. Even through the dust the two-foot white square contrasted dramatically with the rest of the black floor. This was to be the tunnel entrance and was in the left hand corner furthest from the cell's exterior wall.

Two figures knelt over the white square — they were completely caked in dust. I didn't recognise them until they spoke. They returned to work in order to show my workmate and myself what was required of us. That which from outside the cell had been a dull thud became a thundering clang up close. My partner for the shift began work immediately, with the same undefeatable enthusiasm and stamina which he was to exhibit throughout the life of the project.

The Three Musketeers had worked out what could be heard from where. All angles were covered, all reactions monitored. Faces and body language were scrutinised for the slightest sign of suspicion. The second a screw, or even a comrade unaware of the

operation, entered a "danger zone" the work stopped immediately. The early warning system covered all areas in and around the block. Chipping through the concrete was slow, tedious and deafening. It left hands and arms sore and weak. As the hole deepened the more awkward it was to work on. Reinforcing bars criss-crossed through the concrete and had to be cut. These bars and the rough edges of the concrete sides sliced and bruised.

Despite the slow speed, each shift managed to make progress. Finally, 14 inches of concrete and steel later, the breakthrough to the hardcore below occurred. We had our first celebration. Each obstacle which we managed to overcome would increase our optimism and raise our morale even higher.

COMRADE D

The coming and goings from the tunnel cell had to be kept to a minimum and kept from view. Being on scout duty outside the door for long periods daily, I got to know each individual's rhythm as he chipped at the concrete. We had more than one

Tasmanian Devil. I heard their frustrations in word and rhythm — the odd thumb got hit, so did a head and whilst the rest of use were in stitches, the injured was not allowed medical treatment. But at last, through the floor — headache tablets left untouched and, as a Radio Four fan, all that blaring of pop music on a daily basis was so demoting that I eventually knew the words of the chart hits, and my daughter now thinks I'm cool!!

COMRADE C

The satisfaction of helping take the concrete out was unbelievable. Here we were in reputedly the most secure prison in Western Europe doing our utmost to break out right under the Brits' noses. The buzz was incredible and I remember going to bed that night tired but proud of what we had achieved and what surely lay ahead. As I reflected upon our work so far, my eye caught sight of a small picture of the lark from Bobby Sands' writings and I thought to myself: if there was anybody who had the 'spirit of freedom' at that time, it was surely us.

■ THE SHAFT

COMRADE A

The entrance was widened as much as possible to allow work on the five to six feet layer of mainly large rock forming the hardcore. The rocks were pulled, pushed, cajoled and forced out one by one. It was awkward and sore on the already battered and bruised arms and hands. The more we excavated, the further the men had to lean into the hole to work. There came the stage when a comrade had to be held upside down by the feet as he prised out the heavy rocks and passed them to the surface. Next a layer of smaller stones encased in clay was encountered.

COMRADE D

Under the concrete were three inch quarry stones — the waste disposal brief had come



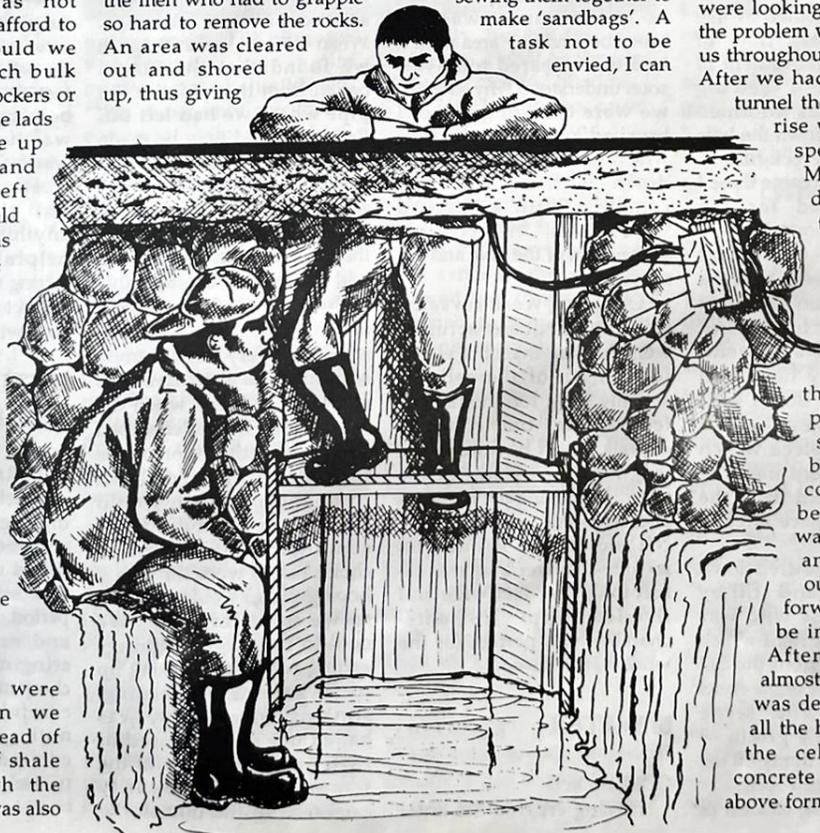
into operation. Well, we lived and we learned — three-inch stones can be twelve inches wide and do not easily fit into pillow cases. Even worse was trying to get them out again! We progressed to using boxes but emptying them quietly was difficult and the noise of clashing rocks was not something we could afford to advertise. Nor could we attempt to hide such bulk under beds, behind lockers or under a mat. But some lads preferred to double up with their mates and conveniently this left empty cells which could be used as store rooms for the debris from the tunnel. We had room to work, piling our stones in duvet covers, even if it was slow. Piling a second layer in place was a double headache, every-time you stood upright you hit the roof and it had to be done in such a way so that it would not be obvious through the window.

COMRADE C

Obviously we were disappointed when we discovered that instead of the expected bed of shale and gravel beneath the concrete floor, there was also

a layer of rock-fill. However, it was a case of ploughing on until we could break through it also. Five-feet down and the rumour that the blocks were built on a mountain and not a bog at all was disproved. We hit clay — much to everyone's obvious delight — not least the men who had to grapple so hard to remove the rocks. An area was cleared out and shored up, thus giving

us a seven-foot deep shaft from which the work of tunnelling proper could begin. After helping break through the concrete and rock fill, I along with other comrades were assigned to scouting duties and the rather tedious job of cutting pillowcases and sewing them together to make 'sandbags'. A task not to be envied, I can



assure you and my full sympathy with anyone who has to do a similar job for a living.

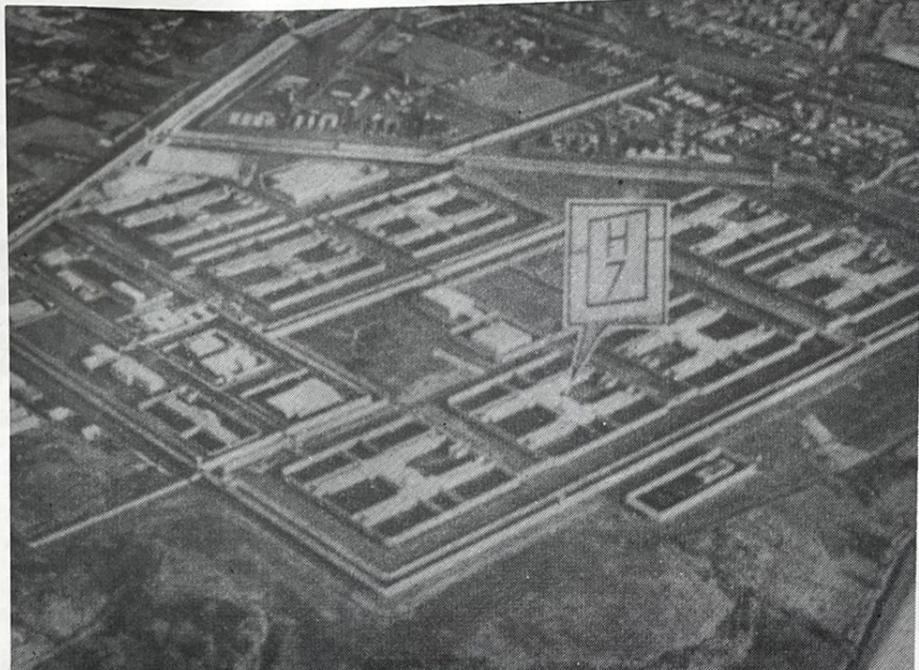
■ **THE ANTE CHAMBER**

COMRADE B

I did not work on the shaft or the start of the progress forward of the actual tunnel but we were all given briefings on the work in progression. It was clear that those men who were trying to start the tunnel were engaged in dangerous and hard work. They were faced with a wall of quarry rocks and small stones — from the size of grit to boulders. Attempts to extract and shore up such a mixture proved almost impossible — at least at this stage it was impossibly slow and dangerous.

COMRADE A

We had sunk a shaft about eight feet deep when it was decided to begin the tunnel. Initially progress was swift as we dug through clay - things were looking up until we hit the problem which was to dog us throughout our endeavour. After we had dug six feet of tunnel the water began to rise with depressing speed. The Three Musketeers decided to raise the tunnel by a few feet and start again thus getting above the water level. This new level took us through tightly packed clay and stones and just below the hardcore. Tunnelling below the rocks was extremely hard and very dangerous. As we inched forward props had to be inserted quickly. After a number of almost fatal rock falls, it was decided to remove all the hardcore beneath the cell. Thus the concrete floor of the cell above formed the ceiling at



the start of the tunnel and we pressed on. The amount of dirt and rocks removed at this stage of the operation was phenomenal. Our first store room was quickly filling up.

COMRADE C

After what seemed to me to be an endless time of monitoring the movement of screws and sewing pillowcases I was informed that I was to go down the hole and help clear the rock-fill.

When my turn came there I was all dressed for the occasion in my shorts, boots, T Shirt and hat — the regular little miner. I was given a quick briefing on the most comfortable way to go down the hole and away I went. Arms above my head and feeling my way down with my feet until they found a wooden cross-piece which held together more sheets of wood which held back the rockfill in the space already cleared.

As soon as I slithered down I was told to stand still by another comrade who was already there. A light which had been rigged from the cell above lay on some of the rocks beside me. The scene reminded me of a grotto — the lights shining dimly on the rocks gave it an eerie feel.

I was told in the clearest of

terms by my comrade that the place in which we stood was very dangerous and I was to proceed with the utmost care at all times. He then demonstrated the method for knocking the rocks out from above and at the side. Under no circumstances was I to move beyond any area until it had been cleared totally. I soon understood why as when we were changing places I brushed against some rocks which immediately cascaded down with an almighty rumble. With a shouted "You're nuts!". My comrade shot up out of the hole and left me to it.

On-going work revealed that the hardcore actually went further than the eight-foot length of the cell - it actually went for another ten feet under the concrete catwalk which runs along the length of the outside of the wing. Removing the hardcore and stone and clay below the cell and catwalk left us with an ante-chamber that was 18-foot long, five feet wide and five-feet deep. This ante-chamber was perfect for the work that followed.

■ WATER

COMRADE B

Having created the ante-

chamber we immediately hit another barrier when tunnelling forward. A black plastic pipe cut across our path at head height in the passage. We reckoned this was where the yard started beyond the catwalk — our shift was over at this stage. When we were on shift again, we found that the tunnel began from that point at the pipe where we had left off. Progress could only be made by going underneath the pipe. The entrance was 24-inches square and going under the pipe meant that we were into the sand and clay again. You had to squeeze through this 24-inch gap and go slightly downwards into a dark, smelly and very wet quagmire of muck. The water level was already a problem when the flood came. The water seeped up through the floor of the tunnel and dripped down from above. Noah would have given up under these conditions, but we had no choice but to work through it hoping things would improve as we went forward. We couldn't imagine things getting worse as anything up to 30 gallons of freezing, stinking water a day was bailed out and disposed of right under the noses of the screws and the security cameras. In the tunnel, the

men had to lie in this freezing filth — sometimes in pitch blackness filling containers and passing them back down the tunnel.

COMRADE D

Having created a mini-mountain of rocks in the store room, after all the filling of boxes, emptying of boxes, filling bags full of rocks, stacking bags full of rocks, falling of stacks of bags full of rocks — we allowed ourselves contented smiles when we hit soil in the tunnel. Aye - before we realised what specific problems soil, especially wet soil created. The stones at least were relatively clean and dry, nor did they smell. The soil, however, it got everywhere, water seeped from it and it gave a damp aroma. In order to move it from the tunnel to the dumping cells every couple of hours, resulted in the bottom half of the wing having to be constantly brushed and mopped throughout the day. No visible sign could be left which might be noticed by the screws, no smell to raise the suspicions of the non-smoking screws — as they walked past the cell doors each morning to test the alarm buttons at the bottom of the wing. We watched them like hawks, watching for every in-take of breath, every eye movement. But they never noticed anything untoward — how helpful our sleeping and farting comrades were in this respect is still the subject of a long-winded debate.

■ THE CHARACTERS

COMRADE A

During the early stages of digging the entrance and ante-chamber were widened and tidied up. But the entrance was still tight during this period. Everyone on entering and exiting received long stinging cuts on the back, chest and arms. We had to be careful that these weren't noticed by the screws, comrades unaware of the tunnel and our visitors. Of course medical assistance was

out of the question. Everyone was pushed or pulled in and out of the hole with the exception of one — he who we named "The Snake". He entered and left the hole as if he was oiled. He could drop into it like a stone and on exit he popped out as though he were spring-loaded. He reminded me of a magician appearing on stage; all that was missing was the puff of smoke and the "Hey Presto".

If 'the snake' could put in a magical performance at this game, then we also had our very own Tommy Cooper. The first time he was entering the tunnel, two of us were there to assist him down. "Now there's a way of doing this", my comrade began explaining to him. "Face forward away from the corner, go in diagonally with both arms up in the air. We'll hold your arms and lower you down". Our comrade sitting at the edge of the hole was unimpressed — he looked at us both with the expression of a patient mother listening to a chattering child. The point was re-emphasised to him. "Now have you got that, you know what to do?". "Yes," he replied with a feigned expression of concentration. "I think I understand what's needed to climb into a hole. Let me run through it just once. It sort of sums up like this: ya sit on the edge of the hole and simply fall into it." He proceeded to do the exact opposite of what we had advised. We stood over him willing to help but apparently not needed. We waited for him to disappear. His head and shoulders and one arm remained visible. He began to make strange noises. After a minute of these 'strange sounds he said: "I'm stuck." His tone betrayed nothing, he appeared completely unperturbed. We both examined him, we pushed at him and then tried to pull him. It was obviously hurting him — the cut re-inforcing bars and rough concrete edges were cutting into his clamped shoulders and chest.

"Can you move at all downwards?" My mate asked him: "Not a bit of it," came the



instant reply. His physique was deceptive, he was slim but very broad shouldered. "You're not only stuck", my comrade informed him, "You're fucking well stuck!" His terrible position and his calmness could only invoke one reaction — the two of us fell about laughing. Trying not to laugh only made it worse. The tears were tripping us. It was sometime before we could even talk. Our comrade, though, remained stoic and patient. "When you two boys are finished, maybe you'll help me out." We tried to control ourselves.

"Shall we push?"

"You'll fucking not," he replied immediately "Grab my arm, wait till I get a foothold. Now when I say pull, start hauling."

We stood over him, grabbed his arm and on his command we pulled. I cringed, I swear I could hear the skin ripping. "Keep pulling," he ordered. Out he came slowly, and certainly

painfully, but his face was impassive. He sat on the edge of the entrance and lifted his T Shirt. His chest and back were covered in scrapes and cuts. He quickly wiped himself, turned 180 degrees and without hesitation slipped back down the hole — this time at the proper angle and both arms in the air. We lowered him down. It was extremely tight but he slowly disappeared into the dark hole.

"What happens if you can't get out, mo chara?" I called to him leaning over the hole. When he looked up all we could see was the huge smile.

"Well you two boyos better start widening the mouth of it now, hadn't ya?" With that he turned and started to dig. The two of us could only look at each other in amazement. Then we got to work on the entrance.

COMRADE B

For some weeks, months actually, I had found signs of odd bits of clothing going

missing. On the wings, we operate a collective system of washing clothes and once they're washed they're placed in a series of bins for each individual to collect his own. In one bin we put jeans/tracksuit bottoms, in others tops, socks, underwear and the best quality clothing (used for visits) are placed in another and so on.

Every so often all the "unclaimed" clothing those which are getting threadbare — are packed away for use when people are painting cells or the canteen or shower area. Such old clothing serves as "boilersuits".

But the stuff I noticed going missing was by no means threadbare. I actually put a notice up on the wall enquiring about the missing clothes.

Little did I know but even at this early stage, articles of clothing were being gathered for use by the tunnel teams. I realised this when I went to get ready for going down the tunnel and recognised some clothing of mine amongst the items available — others found their clothes too and we had a good laugh at this. Certainly, no one was complaining considering the good use they we're being put to.

■ AT THE FACE

COMRADE C

When finally I got to dig at the tunnel proper the difference from the last time when I was clearing the rocks was unbelievable. The tunnel now extended about 30 feet from the point where the rockfill ended. The entrance lay beneath a sewage pipe which had been exposed at the very end of the rockfill. The entrance measured approximately two feet square — just space enough to squeeze through.

I got a briefing on how best to proceed along the tunnel: lie flat, keep the head down, arms bent at the elbows and shuffle forward on your hands and knees. I also had to push an aluminum baking tray in front of me to use at intervals



in taking back the clay I had dug out with the improvised spade which was left at the face. It is possible that this was the first surreptitious tunnel in history to have fluorescent lights. These lighting units were in small wooden boxes and were quite ingenious and highly functional. Unfortunately they were not infallible (the conditions would have caused problems for NASA!). It didn't matter how clever the design, the atrocious environment quickly reduced everything to a soaking mucky mess. The creator of this lighting system was also responsible for the never-ending job of maintenance and repair. The fact that there were no serious injuries from electrocution is testimony to the excellent job accomplished by him.

Going up the tunnel for the first time proved to be what I can only describe as scary. Forget bravado, I'm no different from anybody else, the whole period I worked in the tunnel I had a healthy respect for the place. Here I was, crawling through an enclosed space surrounded only inches away on all sides by tons of clay and no amount of reassurance could convince me that there wasn't the distinct possibility of the whole lot coming in on top of me and burying me alive. The thought was almost too

horrendous to contemplate but still it was there, ever lurking in the back of my mind.

When I'd overcome the initial uneasiness and I began to move forward, I became more aware of my surroundings. The roof of the tunnel was covered by a two by two square piece of wood supported by wooden staves which stood vertically to the ground. These staves rested upon smaller pieces of wood a couple of inches square which were laid flat on the floor to help give stability. The other thing which struck me about the place was the dampness — you could feel it in the air like it had a substance.

I eventually reached the face and immediately I found myself sinking a couple of inches into a soup of clay and water. I groped round and found the "spade" half buried in the clay. After a period of what can best be described as floundering around I managed to get into a position where I would dig. This proved to be a skill in itself as you had to start from a point two or three inches from the floor, beginning in the centre. From there you cut out the clay on the left and right moving upwards until you reached a point roughly level with the roofing.

It took a tremendous amount of effort to achieve this and your strength was

quickly sapped. As time went on, conditions grew steadily worse with water constantly seeping in from below and above. Usually the end result was that by the end of your stint you were half buried in muck. It didn't help any that the tray for carting out the clay to be dumped could only be maneuvered underneath your body so that the boys at the other end could pull it back using an improvised rope. You also used a rope to return the tray to the face again

■ ESCAPE A PERSONAL DECISION

COMRADE B

Since the discovery of the tunnel, people have talked about the fear in such an enclosed and dangerous place. At the start fear does have a grip on you, although I personally found that initial grip lessen to a certain degree as I became used to going down the tunnel. But each time I entered that dark hole it was a challenge. You had nightmares about the dangers and I fought to cast out fear by recognising (a) that we're doing all we could to ensure safety; (b) the importance of the operation. But naturally, as we had experienced the hazards involved with cave-ins occurring, men were

conscious that injury or fatality was a possibility. We even spoke in joking terms about what we would do in the case of a fatal cave-in, suggesting that the poor victim could be buried in the cell filled with clay until after the tunnel was complete. But nobody really wanted to contemplate the worst scenario.

There were a couple of men who could not overcome their fear of going into the tunnel — but they carried out other roles which were vital to the operation and no one considered their fear as anything to be ashamed of. For me one of the most fulfilling things about the operation was seeing how well all the comrades were able to pull together. Here I was on an operation with men I had never operated with on the outside — men from all geographical backgrounds and of all ages and I found great pride in how well they 'gelled' as a cohesive group, right from the word 'go'.

We knew our time on this operation would be short for what we set ourselves to achieve. We had in place a round-the-clock system of work teams. For each team in between shifts down the tunnel, there were long periods of doing extra security-related work. Work on the tunnel stopped for only three reasons: (1) during the

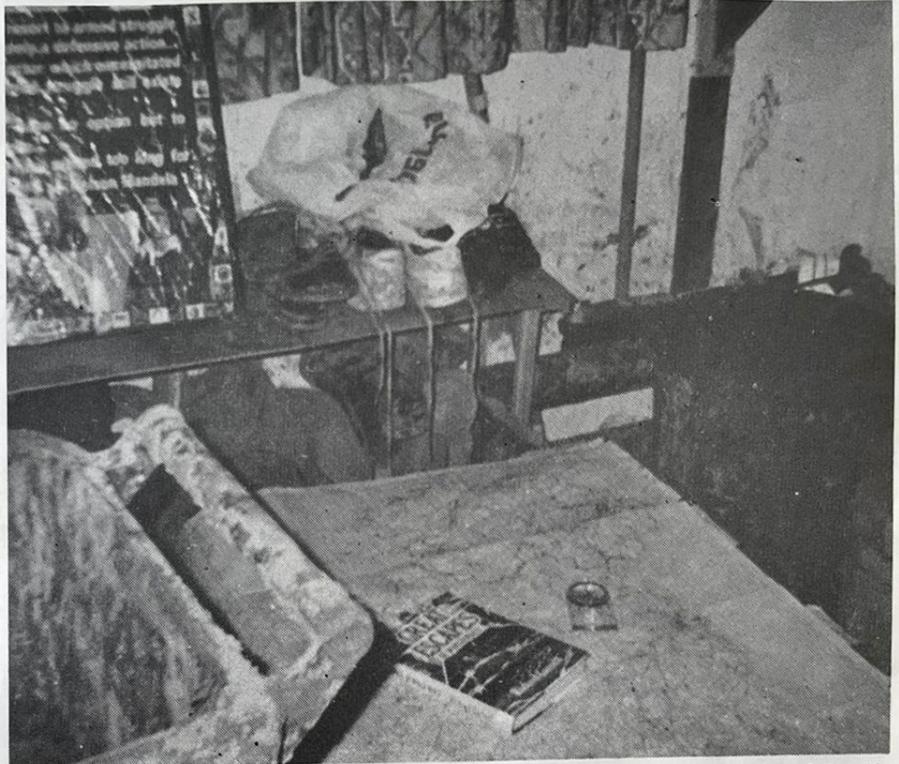
period of checks in the morning when the screws walked up the wing: (2) if anyone not privy to the operation came up the wing; (3) if the Three Musketeers were up the tunnel surveying the progress and assessing the situation — if for example a problem arose. (of which these were many!)

The continual work was manageable at the start but as time went on everyone was showing signs of tiredness and strain. My heart went out to the Three Musketeers because they were on call 24 hours a day — they worked down the tunnel in teams like the rest of us, plus they supervised the whole operation. Moreover while all of us carried at a personal level the worry about progress they had the whole operational organisational responsibility and weight on them.

■ SECURITY

COMRADE D

As the tunnel progressed men were working on air pumping schemes, making shoring for the tunnel, gadgeting for electrical work and there were many other ongoing schemes. We could not let anybody down the wing to see what was going on in these cells, or to see men sleeping on other men's floors during the day. Everybody had to be intercepted, side-tracked, made unwelcome or told white lies. Whoever they were looking for was always in the yard or the other wing, which gave us time to produce the desired person. It became a case of "Nq Pasaran" beyond the canteen. Security being paramount we tended towards the paranoid initially — nothing and nobody moved without us reacting instantly. Yet we had to keep things looking normal in front of the surveillance camera. Defining what was normal for us was a debate in itself. Ducking heads appeared magically from everywhere at any strange noise or voice — a problem of our overly security —



conscious selves. We had to resolve the head-popping out syndrome. Our open friendliness with one another stood out in stark contradiction to our anti-social suspicion of anybody else, problems compounded by those among us who were jokers by nature and anti-social as a norm. But sure we had a laugh trying to resolve these issues. Our lives became "It" and "It" became us. We ate, slept, washed, had visits, played football, wrote and phoned home according to "It" the word tunnel being scarcely, if ever, mentioned.

Each and every day of the operation "It" followed a set routine given to us the previous night. The wing had to look normal for the arrival of the early morning wandering screw. The constant dumping of debris in the empty cells left its obvious traces. Brushes, mops, floor polish and elbow grease had the black shiny floor all clean and dried before the screw appeared and without being seen as abnormal to the camera. Once the screw was off the wing, the routine was: knock up the first tunnelling

shift, let out the graveyard shift to wash and/or sleep, switch on covering noise, watchers in place at windows, walkers, runners and handicrafters in place, keep fit enthusiasts getting energetic and noisy and last but not least, one man outside the tunnel cell to warn when work should continue or stop. The day's normal routine of cleaning, washing dishes and general maintenance also had to be visibly maintained.

Trying to sleep amid our 22-hour working day was a problem — even if the noise at night was kept to a level which did not require cover from the noise Abatement Society — we still heard "It". Security was tight in human-endurance terms for us all but three of our number even more so: The Musketeers shift was all day every day — even in their sleep digging noise was heard coming from their own cells. "It" dictated even the nightmares — as for myself, I had us tunnelling into a giant rabbit burrow!

COMRADE A

No one likes having to tell their loved ones but

sometimes you were left with no choice. Accidents of schedule could result in odd behaviour. For instance, a late or all night Graveyard Shift could leave you yawning throughout the visit the next day.

"Sorry love, a late-night movie last night."

"Your skin has become very dry, dear."

"Yeah, it's the water in here, love."

"Your hands have got very rough. Where did you get all those blisters from?"

"It's the woodwork I'm doing for the PDF."

"Jesus, dear, your arms are all covered in cuts and bruises."

"I was playing football on the all-weather pitch, it's a real bugger to fall on."

■ THE DIFFICULTIES

COMRADE C

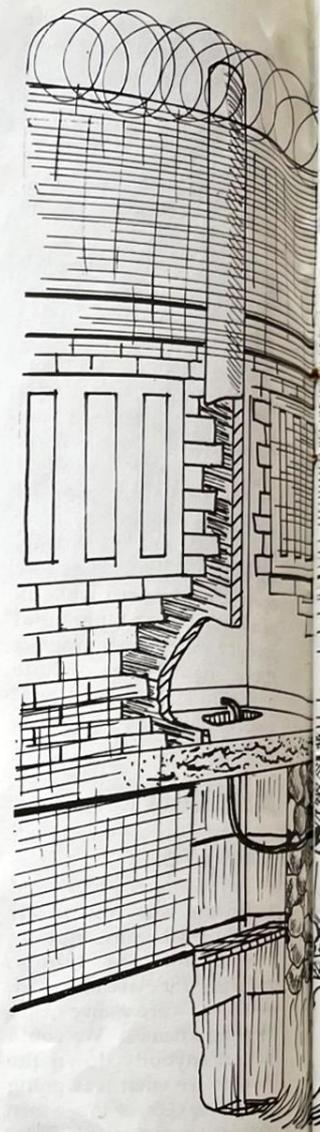
Time on the wing now seemed to be completely split into two periods — work and rest. Nothing else was of significance, football, visits and chores were distractions.



The important things were: how much we had dug each day? Was the water in the tunnel getting worse? and, on a lighter note, who was unlucky enough to have got zapped when they brushed against the electric cable? The tunnel itself had extended to over 60 feet. Two major problems had to be contended with. One was the air — or

lack of it. Since there was only one entrance to the tunnel the flow of air was of course minimal and became more so as the tunnel lengthened. This resulted in men developing terrible headaches due to the lack of oxygen to the brain and therefore they could only work for short periods of time before needing a rest. Secondly the bad weather had

continued unabated and the men had to spend as much time and energy bailing out water as they did actually digging. It was very frustrating. The conditions inside the tunnel were deplorable with water running from the face where we were working right back to the ante-chamber under Cell 18. The water was weakening

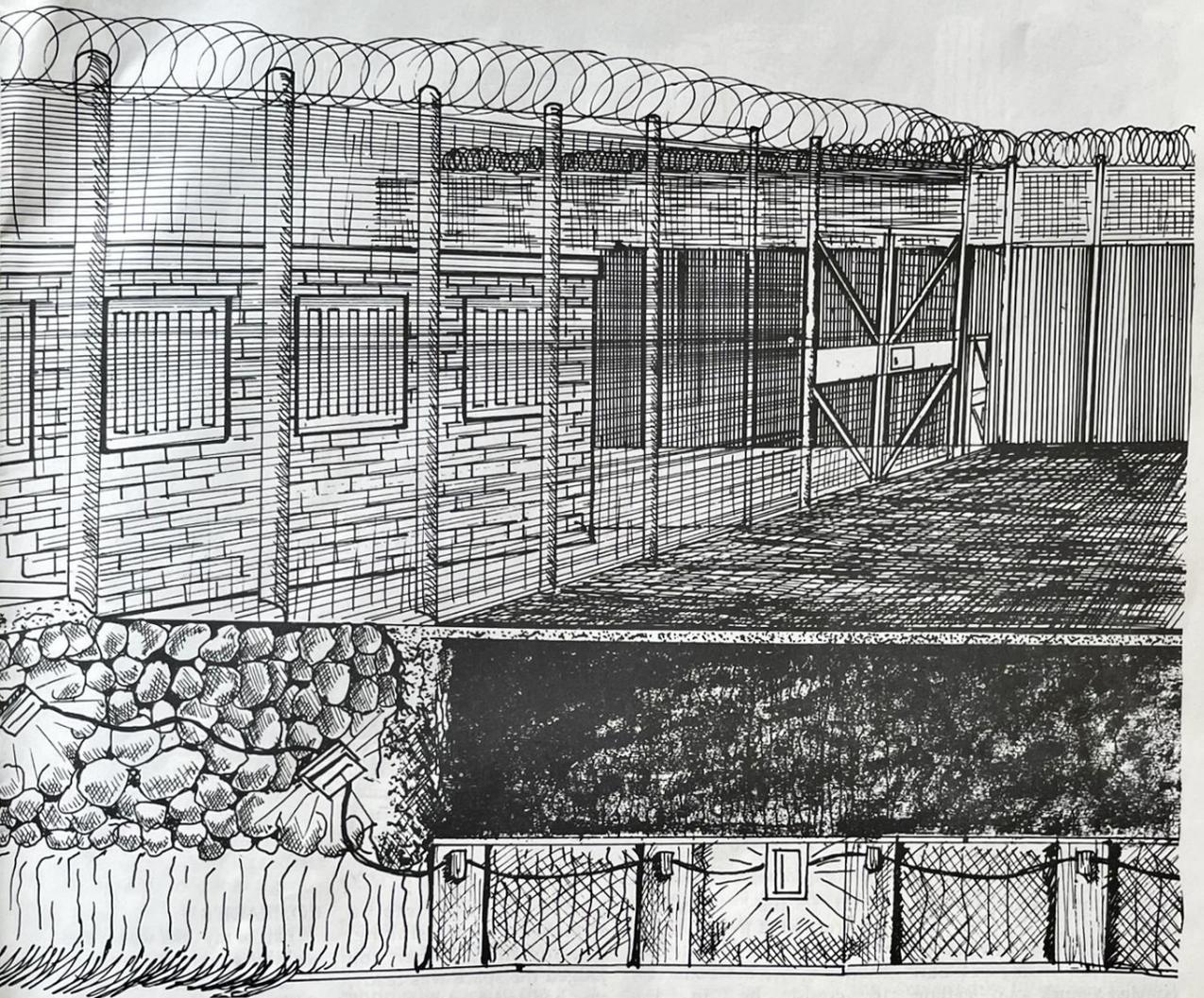


the shoring which made work at the face dangerous. But still the men worked on as relentlessly as they could.

COMRADE B

Right from the start the amount of water we had to bail out was unbelievable. We bailed out hour after hour, day after day. A system was used whereby water gallon containers were filled with a small scoop and then dragged to the bottom of the shaft and headed up to the man above in Cell 18. These were then emptied into large drums and a wheelie bin.

There were times we spent a whole four-hour shift bailing out water so that the next team would have workable



conditions. All work in the water caused waves — digging, carting out debris from the face, even bailing — which lapped against the sides and weakened the shoring. The battle against the water was never-ending. There were periods when we were working six to eight inches in this freezing cold slop. While you were labouring at the face, you found yourself sweating and so the cold didn't bite you the same way. You didn't know how cold you were until you moved back to the tunnel entrance to get a rest. The steam rose from your body and you found yourself shivering uncontrollably as the cold went to your very bones.

More often than not it would be necessary to go up to Cell 18 to get changed and for the next man to go down and take over your role, pulling the tray of clay back from the face to the tunnel entrance.

In Cell 18, we had a large bin full of water — we would take off our wet muck-clad clothing and bathe in this bin to remove the muck from us. We had strict security regulations for each shift — under no circumstances could anyone leave the cell dirty — you could clean up as much as possible ie no trace of muck on you, and then go to a nearby cell for a final cleaning. The late night shifts couldn't go to the shower/bath area, as to do so meant going into the

view of the camera which observed the wing. Later when the wing was getting into its daily routine and people moving around normally we could then go for a shower without arising suspicion.

■ WE HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY...

COMRADE D

Since all our cell doors are unlocked 24 hours a day we had to devise a fail-proof way of stopping them swinging open at an inopportune moment — duvets full of rocks or a mini-landslide would have been a hint to the

most dopey screw. We blocked the inside doorways of the two dump cells with table tops, two-feet high to begin with, raised to four feet as the digging progressed. Climbing in through the remaining two-foot space — left at the top of the doorway was hectic to say the least.

We became soil "Berts" (sarcastic prison slang for experts). We surveyed it for how wet it was so we knew what conditions we would be working in later at the tunnel face. Was it sandy and easy to dig? What did the dead vegetation in it mean? Where did the old rock come from? The soil in many ways dictated our moods but no matter what the quality, when



the quantity was big, we were happy!

Wet soil equalled water — and water from wet soil equaled a muck soup - getting rid of 40 to 50 gallons every day was no easy task, especially when the only disposal area was under the wing camera and a couple of yards from where the screws sat. The means of achieving this had to be established so that it fitted in with what the camera observers would seem to be the norm in our daily activities. We used may ruses and a lot of "innocent movement" evidently with 100% success as no-one noticed anything untoward while we carried out this mammoth task.

COMRADE A

That there were no serious injuries and no one actually caught under a fall says a lot

about the physical construction of the tunnel. It was sturdy and reliable, the shuttering system was the best it could be in the circumstances. The wooden uprights had to be constantly checked and repaired. The water undermined the props in many places and they had to be repeatedly packed up underneath.

Putting in a new set of wooden props could take anything from 30 minutes to two hours. Once the space for a set of shuttering had been dug the 15 x 33 inch roof, the four 23-inch uprights and the two 15 x 13 inch bases had to be dragged up to the face. Firstly the space had to be tidied up to allow the shuttering to go up. A wooden measure was used to judge the distances. The floor was left to last as the deeper you dug the quicker the

ground turned into a wretched, arm sinking, freezing slime. When you judged the space was ready, you had to lie on your back trying to keep your head out of the muck and push the roof into place. The bases were put on the floor and the uprights were set in one at a time between the roof and the bases. The props went in at an angle first and then they were hammered upright. How long it took depended upon how precisely you had judged the distances. Very often one or all parts had to be taken down and reset again. Everything would become covered in the freezing slime, it dripped and splashed into eyes, mouths and ears. Half blinded, partially deaf and with the putrid taste of wet mud in the mouth, the men groped about in the muck putting up the shoring.

COMRADE B

Part of my brief was to deal with air supply to the tunnel — or as time went on I should say lack of air supply. I had ideas in my head as to how to overcome this, no fixed ideas at first but a general outline of how I might be able to approach the problem and overcome it. Certainly even in the early stages a serious problem concerning breathing arose for the diggers at the tunnel face. However at this point in time it was so much to do with lack of air as the presence of a very foul smelling of gas. I don't know what its source was — possibly a leakage from a sewer but it effectively meant that it was possible to work at the face for only 20 minutes at a time. By then your head felt as though it were going to explode and you would need to move back and rest. These

severe headaches would last for a couple of hours. I have suffered very badly from migraines throughout my life — but these headaches were very painful indeed. Some men felt great panic when the headaches began as they were sudden and sometimes accompanied by palpitations of the heart. I guess this was a combination of exhaustion and anxiety.

As we were progressing with the tunnel, the problem was compounded by the fact that while digging out the face, it was necessary to dig from the roof down to prevent yourself being submerged in water. You were working in a very cramped space and often your body would act like a plug hindering air getting up to your head. Obviously resolving the problem of air supply was a priority.

In between shifts down the tunnel and doing security shifts, I sat in a cell allocated for my work, drew up plans and experimented with systems. Two systems which I had made were not successful so I abandoned them and settled for the third one which I found to be the best option open to us. This system was constructed from a large plastic bin and chair legs. The bin was converted into a giant plunger while the metal tubing from the chairs was cut and straightened into roughly four foot lengths. We had enough in the wings to reach our goal and many hours were spend cutting, straightening and even bending these tubes to be installed the length of the tunnel — each four-foot length being joined to another. Air was forced up the tunnel from the bin through the tubes.

I was also asked to develop a suction pump to help extract the water. I spent a couple of days trying to work out a feasible system but in the end simply bailing out by hand was the only workable method because of the sand and muck in the water. Even a filter on a suction system wouldn't work because it clogged up almost immediately. We sunk some

wells into the floor of the tunnel to help accumulate the water for bailing out but we would never deal with the water problem effectively.

COMRADE A

The longer the tunnel became the greater the problems encountered with the dirt trays. They would continually stick in the most awkward places. Either the digger at the front or the hauler at the back would have to crawl towards it and work it loose. This toing and froing was exhausting. Numerous attempts were made at solving the problem. One of our number liked nothing better than attempting to solve problems such as this, his many "toy" making enterprises were famous. However his initial title as "The Toy Master" quickly changed to "The Toy Disaster". His wheeled trolley blew his "toy" making reputation out of the water — or sunk it in that dark quagmire. It began with his assertion one day that he would solve the tray problem.

Off he went; much wood and time later a wooden trolley with wooden wheels was produced. He was clearly proud of his baby. "look, the wheels spin", he said with a big smile. I looked upon this invention in all its glory before it was put to the test.

That night I was in Cell 18 preparing for my shift when I asked how well had the trolley performed.

"It's been decommissioned, there it is now."

My far from impressed comrade pointed to the corner where the sad article lay in a number of pieces. The sad remains looked as if it had been run over by a truck.

It's maiden voyage was of a Titanic nature. It had sunk, jammed, jarred, dragged and generally cocked up from the word go. The lads, always mindful of the sensitivities of those willing to put themselves out and make an effort, had kicked the disastrous toy to bits and dumped it. This wooden trolley, with the wooden wheels just wouldn't go.

But thankfully there were

successes to compare with the failures. The Boat was a shining example. One day one of the men came up out of the hole in Cell 18 cursing and swearing in frustration. "That fucking tray would put you mad. There's more work put into sorting it out than digging. We'll have to try something else." He was covered in filthy muck from head to toe. His whole body shook with the cold. That afternoon he came to my cell carrying a three-foot by two metal lid. His theory sounded like hard work. "We'll cut it in four places, fold the metal over on itself, drill and bolt the sides. That will leave us with curved sides, a sloping back and front. It'll have a bow and a stern, just like a boat. It'll be streamlined and have a low centre of gravity. It'll work, I promise. He was very convincing. When it was explained to a few of the other lads it was laughed at and ridiculed. Luckily one of the Musketeers thought different, he urged us to give it a try if we thought we could do it.

Everything about it was



ESCAPE - A PERS

I WAS CALLED to a meeting at which we were told of the plan that lay ahead, ie a tunnel, a way of getting out, escape! All kinds of emotions were experienced in those few short minutes, excitement, surprise, apprehension, all rolled into one big knot in my stomach — it almost burned. Unbelievable. Initially the feelings were great, I'm getting out of here, no more Screws, no more H-Blocks. There was also a great sense of pride that I was part of this important and potentially far-reaching event, that I was going to have another chance to take part in the struggle on the outside — a chance to work for Oglagh na hÉireann in fields (pardon the pun) which I'd never a chance to work before. The butterflies in my stomach were flapping wildly at the thought of it all.

For the first day or two it hadn't really sank in or struck me as to what exactly the tunnel involved — not the actual hard graft in its construction but the effect it could have on the rest of my life. If successful my life would be changed forever. The stark reality was that my relationship with my partner and close family would be seriously affected. All the ideas and dreams of some kind of normality for my partner, my family and me after my release all had to be reassessed. There would be nothing permanent or routine which families enjoy, no socialising in the local area, no going to the pictures with my partner, going for walks in the park - all this would no longer be possible. These were the seemingly simple things I had dreamed of and now I had to look at it all in a different light. It was emotional turmoil to say the least.

I started talking to a few of my comrades about the situation asking what were their thoughts and plans and to my sheer relief I realised that I wasn't the only one who had doubts. But at the same time I did feel guilty. This was on two fronts. Firstly, the IRA was going to such lengths to put an "ealu" together and I felt that I was letting these lads down by even

having to think about my decision. Secondly, as I've already mentioned, there were the concerns regarding my partner, family and friends and the huge impact this would have on them. I always knew that after my release I would enjoy some life with my partner and family but ultimately I would be weighing back to the struggle and be prepared to face the consequences — jail again or death. But this, the tunnel, was like an exocet just blowing my plans out of the water and sky high.

This was how I was feeling for the first week after being briefed about the tunnel. Eventually I went to one of the musketeers, one of the lads who was co-ordinating the whole operation, and explained to him what had been on my mind for a number of days. To be honest I felt guilty admitting to him that I had these doubts but I knew it was best to lay it on the line, where exactly I was coming from and I asked the questions which I thought needed to be answered. If the "ealu" was successful how long before I could make contact with my partner or family? What would our initial situation be, what conditions would we be living in? But besides the answers to these questions, I wanted to be able to talk to someone about my main concern, ie my relationship with my partner. I felt that in some sense I was betraying her. Initially when talking to her on the phone it was awful for I had to act normal but at the same time I'd be thinking that when she found out that I had escaped she'd be thinking I didn't trust her and she'd be left wondering what was left of our relationship. Also my family, God knows how long it could be before I'd see them again — and what sort of a re-union would it be? One day while talking to my mother on the phone I just out of the blue said: "Ma, I love you". I'm sure she was wondering what tablets I was on. But fair play to the musketeer who listened to all this and answered my questions as best he could. He seemed to understand where I was coming from and it was as if he expected people to talk about these very things.

Yarning with other lads we were going through the possibility of life on the run. I'd heard all the old stories of escapees in the past, lying out in ditches, sleeping in barns, hiding under floorboards - the kind of stuff I didn't particularly relish the



thought of. But at this time the actual work on the tunnel had commenced and it was a welcome distraction — a chance to 'escape' from my thoughts for a bit.

After a week or so I finally made up my mind. There were a couple of factors which finally influenced my decision. One was that I just had the feeling that my partner would understand — she might not like it but she would understand the new circumstances. I would make the effort to come and see her when it would eventually be possible and that was comforting. But the main factor was commitment. Now I don't want to sound

PERSONAL DECISION



like a 'Dan Breen' character but I always knew in my heart had I'd be going back to the IRA after my release, so really what was the difference in doing it then and going for it now when I had the opportunity. I knew I wanted to go for it.

So I went back to the lads in charge of the operation and I told them of my decision and I felt magic, really sound. Now I was totally enthusiastic about what lay ahead of me even though the thought of going down a tunnel scared the shit out of me. Claustrophobic me, down a tunnel! Never!

Once I had made the decision it was as

if a ton weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I'm sure that first week or so it was noticeable that I wasn't myself — but I'd say almost everyone was out of sorts to one degree or another initially. I also felt good with myself because I knew I had thought this out thoroughly. I had listened to other people and I had sought other people's advice. I wasn't just a matter of saying "ealu" no problem, I'm your man, let's go", without thinking of the consequences and what lay ahead — it could possibly be the biggest decision of my life. I was proud that I was able to be honest with myself and the lads and that I

didn't allow anyone to sway my decision - and I knew that what I had decided in the end was the right course, no matter what happened. I no longer felt guilty when talking to my partner or family because I was convinced that what I was doing and going to do was the right thing to do.

I was going to rejoin the struggle outside; and I felt that because of previous experience, the politics and education which I had developed while in jail, and maturity after my years inside that I'd be a far better asset to the Republican Movement than I was prior to my imprisonment.

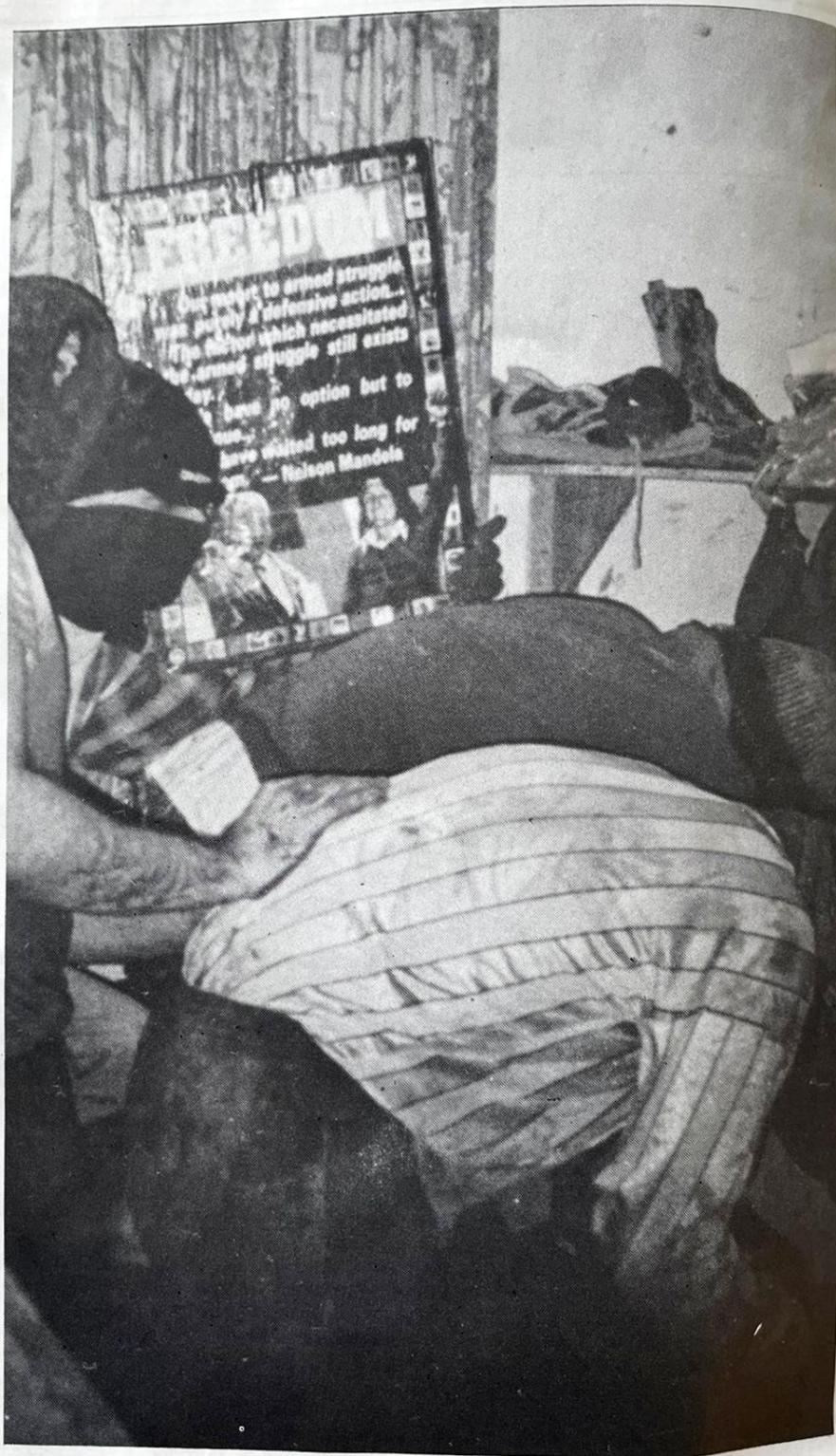
hard work. The metal was not light and our tools were not made for the job. But two days later it was finished. Bets had been placed against us even reaching this stage so we had won outright on the first part of the project — now it was to be put to the test. It went like a dream. Nothing stopped it, it floated, it sailed — I swear it flew. It travelled like a bob-sledge up and down the tunnel. It was easy to manoeuvre and load and unload. The shipwrights were wearing very large smiles.

■ OUT OF THE BLOCK

COMRADE C

Cell 15 was now full from top to bottom with tunnel debris. Cell 16 was now also being used to store the clay. As the tunnel lengthened talk among ourselves naturally turned to what we'd be able to do once we gained our freedom. We all knew we were going to weigh back to active service and no one was under any illusions what kind of life that would entail. We were also looking forward to the chance to meet up with family and friends outside the confines of prison. So despite the difficulties we were meeting in the tunnel, morale always remained high — it was never a problem.

The news that we had breached the perimeter fence of H7 made our spirits soar and spurred us on with even more determination. The feeling was better than winning the lottery. Technically we had escaped from the block — from here on everything was a bonus. And one such bonus was that the tunnel had proven its strength under the weight of a flat bed truck. This heavy duty vehicle is used to fix the security lights and the fences in the camp. A section of barbed wire had fallen from the top of the yard fence so it was only a matter of time before they came into fix it. The vehicle would have to drive over the tunnel twice — there was no way of knowing if the tunnel could take it.



With very little warning we learned one morning that the lorry was coming in. We hid in at the windows watching its every move. Concern was written on all the peering

faces. The minutes passed very slowly; back and forward the lorry went; fingernails disappeared until finally it made its way out. Relief filled the wing as the lorry drove

out from the block. There was no sign or hint that the tunnel had been affected in the least — this boy was Olympic standard, and some men wanted to enter the marathon.



Now they wanted to dig, dig, dig.

COMRADE A

Passing under the fence that surrounds the block was a massive morale booster. Everyday as we edged closer to it we got more and more excited. Once the day came and the measured distance told us we were definitely beyond the fence, we were floating on air — the feeling was indescribable. To see the tunnel at this stage was a truly magnificent sight — an impossibility made real. During the lifetime of the operation, extra men were brought on board as they were needed. It was an experience in itself watching their faces from the moment they entered Cell 18. Being told that a tunnel was in progress was a shock in itself but nothing in their imaginations could prepare them for the actual sight of it. When they climbed

into the ante-chamber surprise turned to astonishment which in turn became awe as they looked along the length of the tunnel. Their eyes would just get bigger and bigger the further they entered this subterranean world.

■ CONDITIONS

COMRADE B

Each team after its shift was coming up out of the tunnel covered in muck and soaking wet. Getting the clothing dried was a major problem. We could not use the washing machine or driers as there was so much residue within the clothing that there was a danger of it blocking filters or clogging plug holes - we couldn't risk the "trades" (screws responsible for plumbing and electrical work) being called in to investigate something like that. So we got the muck of the clothes as best

we could in Cell 18 and then left this mucky clothing over the pipes in our cells to dry. Often we had to climb into wet gear before going down the tunnel. I hated having to put such stuff on — not only was it uncomfortable and cold but the grit within the clothes got into all the wrong places on your body where it made life uncomfortably raw.

I developed problems with my feet because they were in the wet for such a long period each day. The skin peeled off and the sandy grit played havoc between my toes. Any cuts or scrapes on the body never got a chance to heal properly in the wet conditions so you ended up with raw scabs which were very sensitive and a constant source of annoying pain in the cramped tunnel.

My nostrils were always filling with mud and each time I blew my nose an awful concoction of sand and muck

would come out. But the only smell I could smell the whole time was the smell of the tunnel.

COMRADE A

Coming back down the tunnel could be a terrible experience. Cold, exhausted and wringing wet it had to be done for most of the time backwards. Elbows and knees were painfully sore from crawling and working. Every 'step' felt like the ground was covered in broken glass. Turning in the tunnel was a specialist trick. Only a few could master it — a person had to be supple, patient and careful. There were only a small number of locations where it was possible to do a three point turn. These slightly wider spots were accidents of the terrain (later we built alcoves at a few points). A slight change in direction necessitated by the local geology could narrow or



widen the passage by a few inches. Even in these places, it could be very difficult. You had to be flat on your back and slowly curl up until your head was between your knees; then pull your legs back under you one at a time until you could push your upper body forward and pull your legs back. Different people had different ways of accomplishing this. But without doubt the master at this was The Snake — he could turn when and where he liked. No one else could

move up and down the tunnel like The Snake. As he slithered back and forth, he reminded me of an eel — a greased-up eel.

One day I was working at the face of the tunnel. The lights were being fixed so I was using a home-made flash lamp for light. I looked back and could see The Snake by the light of his own lamp, he was repairing the uprights and was about 30-feet away facing in the other direction. I shouted back to him that I needed new batteries for my

lamp. I turned back to lift the shovel and continue working — I immediately felt something on my leg. I jumped as if a rat had run my trouser leg. "Here give me your lamp" said The Snake, I jumped again. "Holy Christ, where did you come from?" I yelled. He just laughed, passed me his lamp and took mine. In a split second he had completely turned and was away again. I looked after him — he was already 50-feet away, his head high, his arms and legs going like a lizard on

speed. He was back in a minute with the new batteries smiling and laughing as if he were on his holidays.

COMRADE C

There was no sign of the atrocious conditions in the tunnel improving. If anything all the indications were that they would continue to deteriorate — too much water and not enough air. Now that the tunnel extended beyond the yard fence and into the sterile area (no man's land) the Musketeers decided to

raise the tunnel from its present level. Hopefully this would solve the problem of water seepage from below and now that we were outside the first inner perimeter fence and beyond the tarmac yard, an air hole could be made above to bring a fresh air supply into the tunnel.

By this stage, given the length of the tunnel, we had built alcoves into its sides. These were for a number of reasons. One was to allow one of the men to lie against the wall and help pull the "boat" (the tray, the digger put the clay into) up and down so as the man at the face could concentrate on the digging. Secondly, due to the distance now being travelled from one end of the tunnel to the other, the alcove allowed us the space to turn round and travel up the tunnel face first instead of backwards, which was both tiring and awkward. Thirdly the alcoves were handy places for storing tools and equipment.

Rising the level of the tunnel helped improve conditions immensely. We were now digging through clay which was dry and dug out like butter. Confidence grew even more and we were eager to get on with the business at hand.

■ BEGINNING OF THE END

COMRADE B

When it was decided to come up out of the water and wet clay, it was in an attempt to make faster progress. The initial hopes raised when we were digging through this drier clay were quickly dashed when we hit rocks. We struggled to make progress and every inch was dangerous. I was down removing stones on the Saturday morning before the tunnel collapsed. I had removed a couple of feet of stones when I detected a sign of movement, I withdrew very very fast. It's funny how quickly, in such a tiny space you can pull back like a spring when you hear and feel the roof above you start to fall.



Just in the nick of time, I avoided being caught beneath a heavy fall of rock.

The reports from the teams which replaced us were not good. The Musketeers were seriously considering going back down into the wet clay. Originally, we had hoped that this section of rock was only a seam of a few feet — a drainage trench perhaps. But going back down into the clay was going to bring its own obvious problems — a problem which was only too visible the whole length of the tunnel. The rise in the tunnel level had created a dam from

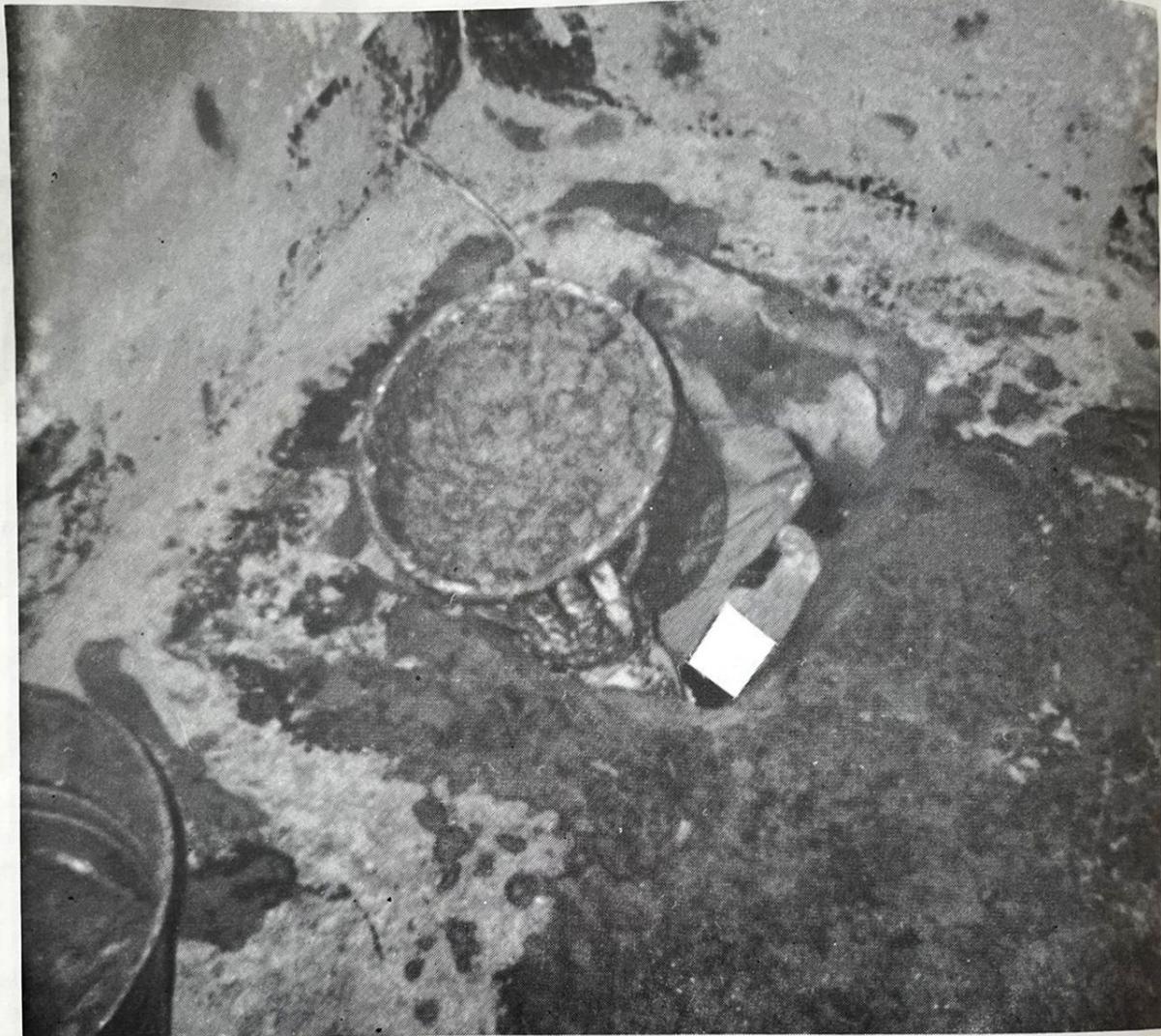
which, stretching back along the original level, there was now six inches of water. However, before options could be fully worked out events overtook us.

COMRADE A

Being involved in such an enterprise as the tunnel, confirms a belief that all problems are solvable and all obstacles surmountable. However, to achieve success required not only determination, commitment and resourcefulness but time also. The clock was ticking against us. The next search

could come at any time. Raids had taken place in other blocks. Obviously a search would have brought it all to an end — it is impossible to hide tons of clay and rock. Contingency plans were drawn up well in advance - whatever happened we would be ready for it, and we were.

It was ironic that a piece of seemingly good news was in fact the beginning of the end. Despite all the efforts to deal with it the lack of air still caused problems. Then late one night a comrade working up at the face shouted back down the passageway, "The



air problem has been solved, it's like a wind tunnel up here now." The message was passed up to Cell 18. The next man up the tunnel soon came hurrying back. He told us that he reckoned the hole had exposed a wall of hardcore and the air must be coming straight from the surface. He wasn't sure but he thought he could hear traffic on the motorway and voices above him. He pulled the light back away from the face in case it could be seen from the surface. It was so quiet at that time, the early hours of the morning, that we could not risk noise or lights. We finished for the night so that The Musketeers could assess the situation next day. The following afternoon one of them went up to have a look.

When checking for signs of a hole in the surface, it was only the quick reflexes of a comrade with him that saved his life as a massive rock fall filled the front of the tunnel.

COMRADE C

I had a day off from the work when I heard the news that the boys had run into more problems with the rockfall. It felt like a physical blow when yet more news indicated that work would have to be slowed until further notice. I was actually at a loss at not having to go down the hole to bale out water or call out for "more brackets" — terrible as this work was — such had my life, indeed all our lives, revolved around the tunnel. We waited anxiously for progress reports

from the Musketeers and any scéal we could get from the lads who were working on some options. Various ideas were tried, discarded or put in place. Then of all the luck, we had a small cave-in at the face. All credit to the lads involved in trying to overcome this hurdle. They managed to put up shoring made from a table with metal legs for added strength under the rockfall. This was to give us a secure environment in which we could inch our way through the rockfall until we hopefully hit clay again. This had almost fatal consequences when one of the men was saved only by the quick thinking action of a comrade who pulled him clear of a rockfall just in time.

But now for the first time, I

contemplated the idea that we weren't going to make it out. I voiced my concern to another comrade who replied that it was right to be realistic and not kid ourselves, that the situation was deteriorating for us. I then felt guilty about voicing my fears after so much hard work and effort by all concerned but I couldn't help the sense of foreboding that I now felt.

■ THE FINAL SHIFT

COMRADE E

On Sunday morning, I went down the shaft for what I suspected could be the last time if things did not go well. We crawled along the tunnel towards the face. It was flooded as usual but unfortunately by this stage,

water had made its way down from the surface above through the stones and onto the once dry area at the face. So now as in the periods prior to us coming up to another level I had to lie in water as I worked.

My partner passed me the "boat". I slid it over my body and I filled it with stones. That done, I got up on as near to all fours as I could and passed the load back under my body. I continued to remove stones in an effort to make some head-way when the final collapse took place.

A pile of both large and small stones came down followed by light gravel. I cringed as I waited for the rest of the stones to follow but it seemed to have stopped at that. Immediately I was aware of the distinct scent of fresh weeds. Then my heart sank as I watched this small green weed roll down the stones and settle in the lamp light in front of me. I knew that a small hole at least must have opened up on the surface. My only hope was that it wouldn't be big enough to be noticed — although I knew then that this was just wishful thinking.

There was nothing more I could do, I picked up the weed and handed it to my partner behind me and we pulled back and headed for Cell 18. As we made our way back through the water, I felt more disheartened than I had felt in a very long time. We had been besieged by problems from the start on an almost daily basis. We made every effort to succeed but unfortunately the odds were stacked against us. Crawling back through this 120-foot tunnel, seven feet beneath the H-Blocks I was disappointed that our escape attempt was over — but we sure had tried.

COMRADE C

My fears that we weren't going to complete the escape attempt were borne out when the Three Musketeers briefed us on how bad the situation had become. Then we got word that a guard dog was barking around the site of the cave-in outside the fence of

the block. Finally the dog-handler came over to see what the dog had found and promptly fell into a hole caused by the cave-in at the face of the tunnel. Now we knew the balloon was up!!

■ UNTIL THE NEXT TIME

COMRADE A

It was a Sunday night when the curtain fell. I was sitting in the Big Cell TV room when the Musketeer came in. The look on his face told the story. "I think we're in trouble, men not only has the

tunnel collapsed at the front but a screw has fallen into it."

I felt like I had been kicked in the stomach. The Musketeer continued "You know the contingency plans, get started right away."

The devastating news had barely registered when we went into damage limitation mode. The feelings of disappointment, uncertainty and forbearance about the immediate future were pushed to the back of our minds. We went through our mental checklists, determined not to forget anything. Once we were sure we had done everything, we checked it all

again.

COMRADE B

That night I was very, very disappointed, but there and then didn't seem to be the time to express it. It was a collective feeling, of course, the pain in realising that we weren't going to succeed after all our efforts, after all our hopes — but we all put on brave faces for the sake of each other, although each of us hurt inside. To feel that way is natural under the circumstances. You only get one chance at such a project — but then in my mind, where there is a will there is a way — and in my experience I am confident that the will exists in abundance.

COMRADE A

Our last meeting before the army of screws descended upon us was sombre but determined. We all knew what we had to do and what way to react to anything they might throw at us. A member of our staff spoke to us for the last time in H7. His parting words raised a smile in all of us: "Hard luck, lads, it was an excellent effort. Everyone in this room can be proud of themselves. Here's to the next try!" We all cheered and went to our cells, we were ready for every possibility.

COMRADE D

The raid came the next morning. We knew the screws would try to extract a price for what our audacious project cost them and their political masters in the face of years of propaganda denying that we were POWs. It was just by good luck on their part that very many of us weren't ex-POWs. But despite their attempts to make us pay we continued to maintain one another's spirits through comradely banter and encouragement. Our morale wasn't going to cave-in — even if the tunnel had.

Morale was held up by the strongest shoring — the knowledge that we had given it our best and it was better to have tried and failed than not to have tried at all.





Reports coming in...

TAP, TAP, TAP,... "yo, an bhfuil tú ann? Are you up yet?" The voice seemed to be coming from inside my head as I fought to get a handle on where I was, what was happening.

Tap, tap, tap,... "yo, come on ahead, hey boy!" It was the "wee effort!" It was still dark.

"Jesus", I thought, "a search or bad news".

I fumbled about for my bits and pieces, pushed open the door and fell back on the bed again.

"What's happening?" I yawned.

"Listen, it was on the radio there at 5 o'clock, there's a tunnel caught in H7. You may let the lads know."

A thousand questions ricocheted about my head but before I could voice one, another had pushed it out.

"Was there anyone caught outside the tunnel? Did it collapse in on top of the lads? Is anyone injured? How did the Brits get on to it? Would there be much of a backlash? How long would it be before they came in here for a search? What about the lads transferred from England? The place will be shut down; when will we see our families again?"

All sorts of worries and

anxieties washing over me, as I pull on a pair of shorts, t-shirt and sandals to head over to the other Wing to rustle up the lads, and shout across to alert the Block OC about the evolving situation.

As usual with jailed republicans, the sense of foreboding doesn't last long and already I find myself calculating the impact of an escape, or even an attempt, on the political situation outside, on the morale of our comrades and on the morale of our people in the run up to the election.

The questions never cease. "How close were the lads? How many more days would they have needed? What sort of number would we be talking about putting out there? What effect would it have on the British government? The image of Paddy Mayhew's big moon face appearing on TV trying to reassure the unionists!"

I shouted across to the Block OC and pass the news. In the process I can see cell

lights going on and can visualise the buzz in B Wing as they begin to come to terms with the news.

As I head back over to my own wing there is a few of the lads up, milling about. Bap and Rinty meet me on the wing and tell me that the news is now on Ceefax. I rush into the Gaeltacht canteen and a handful of guys are already there crowding around the TV.

"Cád é an doigh?" I asked to no one in particular.

"Sin e ansin."

I check the phone. It's working. It is now about 5.30am so I reckon I'll give Sinéad a shout. Never know when I'll get a yarn with her again. The visits would be cancelled for at least a week, maybe a lot longer.

"Hello honey".

"What? What time is it?"

"Look love, this is just to say that I may not see you for a few weeks. It's just to let you know that we're all OK at this stage and that I love you and I'll be thinking of you over the next couple of weeks."

"What the frig are you on about? What's happening?"

"Look, just turn on the Teletext. It's all there. They'll

be cutting the phones off any minute and there'll be no visits. Give my love to the girls and take it easy. Love you, OK?"

"OK love, Bye."

I hate saying goodbyes and hate hearing them.

Shaking myself, I decide to make sure someone is keeping an eye out at the end of the wing to prevent a lightening search, and to ensure everyone is well enough briefed on our search procedure.

Going about this task I can't help remembering back to 1983, when the lads made the break then. How this had lifted our people at a particularly low time. We were still reeling from the numbness of the hunger strike and had been plunged into the period of the Paid Perjurer and Supergrass.

I also think back to 1989 in the Crum when some of the lads were charged with a mad scheme to blow a wall in or a gate down or something along those lines. The after-effects of such a plan would have been difficult of course since they were constantly expecting capers like that in the Crum.

I confess to being one of

the school of republican prisoners who do believe that it is our duty to escape and although I'm not very good at it, I believe we do have to try.

Allowing myself some time alone in my cell, I let my thoughts drift to the lads in H7. I've known some of them for as long as I care to remember; known their families and known their commitment only too well. Whatever the Brits throw at us in the next few days, they'll be able for it.

If '83 was anything to go by it could get fairly rough. Then, they stripped naked anyone left in the Block, gave them just a pair of trousers, handcuffed their hands up their backs and ran them through a gauntlet of vengeful, angry warders and bigoted RUC men who lashed into them with boots, batons and even clubbed them with their guns, all the way from H7 to H8. They also put the dogs onto them as they were run bare-footed, watched all the while by senior prison officials and governors. None of these people were ever charged or made amenable to the courts for the mass brutalisation and abuse of republicans that night.

A mass of activity is going on outside the Block perimeter and I wonder to myself if it represents a similar mass assault on my comrades. Lorries are tearing up and down the roads outside the Block. There also seems to be the presence of heavy tractors and JCBs, all the while accompanied by the drone and chop of the hovering helicopters.

As the sun comes up the details on the news and the Teletext become clearer. It becomes obvious that the lads have intended just sneaking out of the camp. No need for shoot-outs, hijackings or mass storming of the many security systems put in place after the Great Escape. It looks like the idea was that the Brits and jail administration would not know a thing (about it) until they saw the lads give a press conference across the border. Brilliant. I could imagine their

stiff-upper-lips quivering. "Yeah, Paddy 'Cheer up, for goodness sake!'"
All the lads are up, milling about the canteens in small groups.
'Would you have gone?'
'You better believe it I would.'
'You'd hardly go with only two and a half years to do?'
'What are you, nuts? Sure you can't trust the Brits. They might bring back the one-third remission.'
One thing is for sure, the

lads have come through once again. In the face of this all-pervasive surveillance and monitoring, of all the millions of pounds spent on super-duper cameras, electronic gates and grilles, in the face of three warders to every POW, not to mention the hundreds of Brits in their machine-gun posts, their Saxon armoured vehicles and Chinooks, it has been a fluke in the weather that has snazzled us. The lads have created that wee bit of space to just make it possible

and they've exploited it.
We were later to pay a price for it of course. Sixty-six men attacked, humiliated and brutalised by the Riot Squad. Forty-five of these incidents actually taking place in this Block, H5. But sure what the hell, it's all part of jail struggle, underlining the extent to which we undermined their plans of, as Roibeard said, turning this jail into the breakers yard for republicans.
■ By Seanna Walsh

38 inmates broke out of the Maze in 1983 during most successful mass escape

Republican prisoners see escape as their duty

By Carol Robinson
IN THE world of Sinn Féin's Northern Ireland prisoners, it is the duty of the republican to escape. And although I'm not very good at it, I believe we do have to try.



View of the Maze prison complex in 1974.



HOW THE MAZE PRISON TUNNEL WAS DIGGED

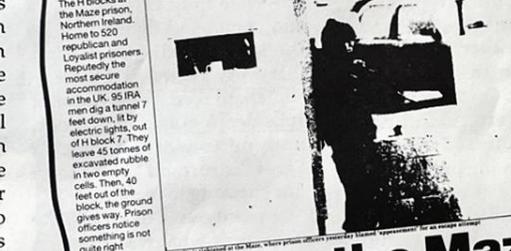
IRA's Maze tunnel escape

By Carol Robinson
A tunnel escape from the Maze prison in 1983 was the most successful mass escape in the history of the prison. It was the work of a group of republican prisoners who had spent months digging a tunnel through the Maze's concrete walls.

90ft from freedom, the Maze

tonnes
The Maze Block 13 inmates, who were about 90ft from freedom, were arrested after a tunnel escape attempt.

H-block escape drama



The H-block escape drama at the Maze prison.

Governor's resignation and inquiry demanded

By Suzanne Brown
The resignation of the Maze prison governor has been demanded by republican prisoners and their supporters. They are calling for an inquiry into the handling of the 1983 tunnel escape.

Tunnel raises issue of who controls jail

By Suzanne Brown
The tunnel escape from the Maze prison has raised the issue of who controls the jail. Prisoners and their supporters are demanding a change in the way the prison is run.

Who runs the Maze?

SILENCE OF MINISTER AND PRISONS' CHIEF SLAMMED

PROBE INTO MAZE

CONVERSION PLAN FOR TOWN'S OLD MILL

Comber jobs boost



The mill building in Comber, which is to be converted into a new housing development.

Call for answers over jail 'blunder'

By Staff Reporter
A call for answers over a jail 'blunder' has been made by republican prisoners. They are demanding a full investigation into the 1983 tunnel escape.

Murdered minister riddle

The murder of a minister has remained a riddle for many years. Prisoners and their supporters are calling for a full investigation into the case.

CRUINNIU ANOIS!

FOR ME it was a normal Sunday night in the H-Blocks with men either watching TV or sitting around in small groups yarning. As for me, well I thought I would enjoy a quiet night in the cell reading a book. Ask me now, the title of that book and I, in all honesty couldn't tell you — such were the events which were to unfold that everything else was pushed back into insignificance.

I had been settled in my cell for about an hour when the peace and quiet was shattered by thundering helicopter blades over the Block. This in itself was not such an unusual event — like any other area of the Six Counties, the shattering of the peace by British forces whether on the ground or in the air has become the norm. However, after a short while it was clear that this British menace in the sky was overly persistent. Just when it was dawning on me that this might not after all be such a normal Sunday night a member of the Block's POW staff entered my cell and told

me to prepare for the possibility of a raid by the Screws or even a storming of the Block by Riot Squads! He was out the door as suddenly as he had entered. Brits above the Block, riot teams outside it, this was no time to be reading books — except maybe combat training manuals or first-aid journals. Having neither, I was out of my cell on the heels of the messenger. On the wing many others were standing in groups confused as to what was happening but alert to the dangers of the Block being stormed. But besides the hovering chopper things seemed to be quiet outside the

Block except for the odd coming and going of Screws. Of course the speculation among the men was rife and those who people reckoned would have any scéal were subtly and bluntly asked to part with some of it. But to no avail - all would be explained in good time, we were assured.

We were beginning to relax a little from our state of high alert when our staff were informed that a couple of governors and Screws would be doing a head count and there was no intention to bring an army of Screws in on top of us that night. The governor and Screws came in and completed their count — the seemed relieved to find that everyone was still there.

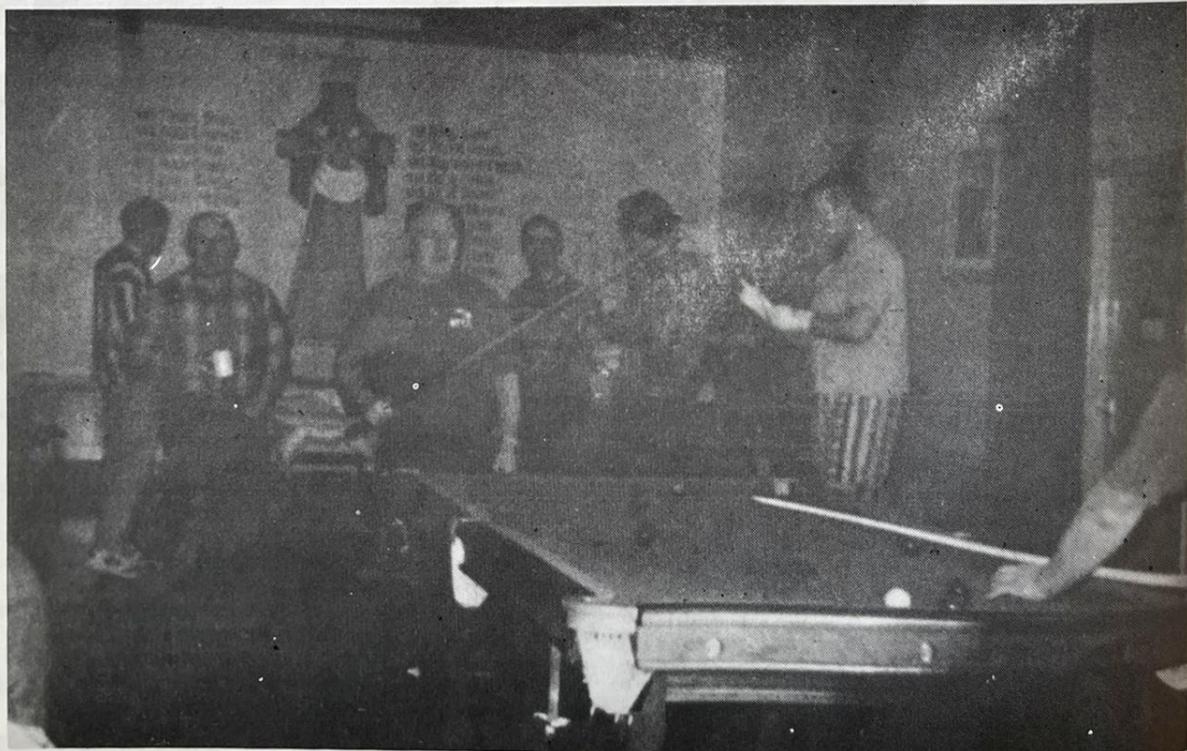
"There seems to be a bit of subsidence outside the Block, nothing to worry about," a Screw informed us. "We're just checking to make sure".

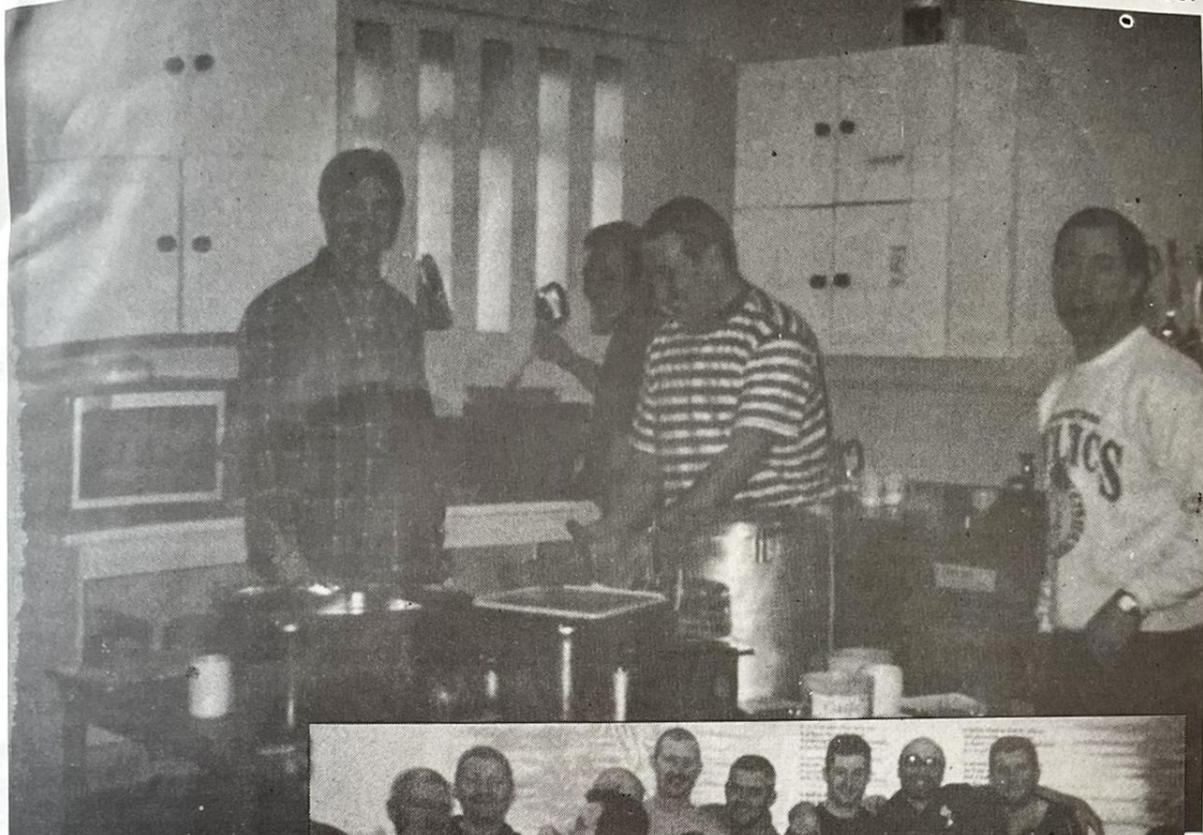
Even those of us who knew nothing of what was going on knew that he knew that he

certainly did have something to worry about. And we were soon to find out what exactly that was — some of us were as shocked as the Screws!

Once the Screws left the wing we were called to a 'cruinniu' by the staff. We all assembled in C Wing canteen, both those who had been aware of the special activities in the Block for some time and those who had no knowledge whatsoever. But we were all eager to hear what there was to report on the night's events.

A senior member of the camp leadership addressed the meeting: "For a considerable period of time now an IRA operation has been in progress in this Block. From A Wing a tunnel has been constructed which stretches 100 feet towards the perimeter wall..." For me this was an absolute shock — a tunnel in the H-Blocks, a tunnel in this Block! All sorts of emotions were welling up inside me but my concentration remained fixed





on what was being outlined about the effort and the conditions endured by those who worked on the operation — not to mention the risks as one Volunteer only 24 hours beforehand almost lost his life in trying to make this operation a success. Many of us sat stunned at what we were hearing, others who knew of the tunnel were now having their worst fears confirmed — the tunnel was discovered, the escape bid had ended. My brain was in a spin. I was hearing how close we were to breaking out — a POWs dream — but at the same time I was learning that it was not to be. The odds just kept piling up against us and in the end the bad luck had scuppered our hope of escape.



I felt so proud that I was close to tears and as I looked around the room that night I could see many men with tears in their eyes, not from a sense of defeat but from a sense of victory.

When the story was finished there was a moment of complete silence and then the beginning of an applause which quickly grew into a standing ovation in salute to the efforts of those who had

worked so hard to affect what would have been the greatest escape by Republican POWs since 38 men vacated this very same Block in 1983.

We came away from that meeting knowing that things had not worked out as any of us would have liked. Despite the best efforts we were to remain incarcerated — for the time being at least. We also knew that from the moment the search teams descended

on the Block the next morning there would be an attempt to break the will of the POWs. But we all knew to a man that the determination which saw our comrades through all the difficulties in the tunnel operation would see us defeat any attempt to sap the will of captured republicans. We would remain as we always had been — committed and proud Irish POWs.

■ By Stephen Canning

As the member of the camp staff continued to relay the details to us a feeling of sadness crept over me yet I did not feel down. Rather a great surge of pride began to well up inside me as it became clear what our comrades had managed to achieve right under the noses of the enemy.

Assault on H5

WE'D BEEN EXPECTING a search of H5 for some time so the helicopter circling noisily over the Block for so long on Sunday evening prompted little comment. "That'll be the fuckers in on top of us in the morning," muttered someone.

So the early morning radio bulletin came as something of a gunk: "A major security operation has been sparked at the Maze Prison following the discovery of a tunnel leading from H7..." As the news percolated down the wing a man began to roar questions "as Gaeilge" from the grill at the bottom of C Wing across to B Wing where a distant, surprised voice could be heard struggling to answer back in broken Irish. Several minutes of this went on before someone realised that the distant voice was in fact coming from a cell half way up C Wing!

Needless to say, as the morning came of age, 'rumour control' swung into action with a yarn about how the tunnel was only discovered by a warder actually falling into it and speculation about whether the enterprise was actually the work of 'swampy' - taking a holiday from his excavation work at Manchester Airport. Later that day, we even heard that a warder had swung open a cell door in H7 only to be almost engulfed by a mini-avalanche of soil and muck removed from the tunnel. The whole thing was starting to sound like the plot of a *Carry On* movie.

Things took a more serious turn over the next several days however as the prison regime recovered from its shock at the feat of engineering that had been managed under its nose and implemented a clamp-down in all three republican Blocks.

Since I had only been a guest of the Brits for a few months, when it was announced that 23-hour lock-up were to be implemented I

wasn't entirely sure what that might actually mean. What it actually means is being confined indefinitely to a modern dungeon so small and barren most people wouldn't keep mice in it.

Effectively cut off from the outside world, the next several days were filled with uncertainty and in-crescing tension on the wing as scéal filtered

through about riot teams assaulting and brutalising men during cell searches in H7 and H4. As diligently as each of us tried to focus on craftwork or whatever it was we were reading, inevitably, after a while, something would cause the reality of our situation to again intrude. For all the men the dominant concern during those days was for their families and how they were coping with not knowing what was happening in the camp — all visits had been halted and the phones cut off from the Monday to ensure that our families would also experience some of the regime's displeasure at us.

Inevitably, stories about the brutality of the regime's reaction to the Great Escape in 1983 were recalled and retold; the account of how a group of warders had attempted literally to beat a recaptured escapee to death by repeatedly smashing his head against some concrete steps; the stories of men being forced to run a gauntlet from one Block to another with warders kicking and batoning each of them as they ran and setting attack dogs on those who collapsed under the blows.

What the regime didn't bargain for however, in its attempt to isolate and intimidate us, was that within



the wing we had a 'secret weapon' - one Thomas "Rinty" McVeigh. A veteran of the Blanket protest, "Ruthless Rinty" as he has since taken to calling himself, had seen it all before and managed, during that week, to help calm whatever shakiness there was and boost morale with a combination of irreverent banter and a singing voice that sounded something like a car alarm going off.

C Wing's turn to experience the regime's revenge for its humiliation at the hands of the "tunnel tigers" came on the Thursday evening of the week. It began with a short pantomime being played out in each cell whereby a search team marched in and ordered the occupant to strip. Then, not being "happy" with the man refusing to humiliate himself by dropping his shorts, the search team would report to

their commander that the prisoner had "refused to cooperate" with the search and that a forcible strip-search by the Riot Squad was necessary. The subsequent assault on the wing by the riot team was short and brutal.

My own experience of it was lightened somewhat by the fact that one of the warders had actually brought along his own music tape. As *Onward Christian Soldiers* blared out from a ghettoblaster, the violent intrusion into my cell of three warders dressed like 'Ninja turtles' and hiding behind body shields, seemed almost operatic. Rude reality intervened again however when the first turtle wrenched a pile of legal papers from me and twisted by head into a headlock whilst the other two twisted each arm up my back into armlocks. They then handcuffed me and, main-

taining the head and arm locks, dragged me out onto the wing and forced me down flat onto the ground. The turtle in front continued to twist my head to one side while at the same time pressing my face forcefully down into the ground so that when I breathed in I also drew in the dust from the floor around my mouth and nose. The purpose of such a headlock in these circumstances goes well beyond simply restraining the individual — none of us forcibly strip-searched that evening offered any physical resistance to the Riot Squad. Rather, in addition to humiliating the captive, its further purpose is to emphasise to the individual his vulnerability. The implicit message from captor to captive is that only a fraction more pressure would be needed to snap the captive's neck.

As my clothes were forcibly yanked off whilst being pinned in this position, it occurred to be that out in the 'world' such behaviour would be viewed as nothing less than indecent assault.

Having humiliated 17 of us in this way, the turtles then 'turtle marched' us into vans for the journey over to the 'punishment block' where we were to spend the night. Images of medieval torture racks and being chained to a wall came to mind. To my relief the 'punishment block' turned out to be just another block of spartan cells kept empty by the regime for just such visitors as ourselves. The thing I remember most about my first night "on the boards" was the hearty singsong and the realisation that I had just witnessed the legendary deviousness of the Long Kesh regime for the first time. Of the 23 men in C

Wing that evening, the regime had separated six from the rest of us and kept them on the wing — whilst trumpeting the lie that these six had "fully complied" with the search by dropping their shorts. It was a transparent if futile attempt to 'divide and conquer'.

Arriving back to C Wing the following morning the first thing that struck me was the almost eerie nakedness of the place. The regime had basically wrenched out everything that wasn't nailed down, along with quite a few things that were. Not content with merely stripping us, they'd decided to strip the very wing itself! The second thing that struck me was the infantile pettiness of the regime and its delinquents. Men returned to their cells to find music systems smashed and clothes, watches, CDs and phonecards stolen by the search teams. In a number of cells the warders hadn't even bothered to hide their pilfering - chocolate bar wrappers and unfinished bottles of lemonade from men's tuck shops were openly left lying around, as if in a two-fingered gesture of contempt for us.

While such petty-mindedness can be dismissed as just another attempt to humiliate and remind us of our comparative impotence in this place, a more sinister discovery for several men was that their photo albums and address books had also been stolen. Given the documented relationship between the state forces and loyalist groupings, it's hard to believe that this wasn't done by the regime in an attempt to deliberately increase the tension in the Block.

A check of my own cell confirmed some pilfering but, more ominously, the fact that my file of legal papers, wrenched from me the night before by the Riot Squad, had been carefully sifted through and particular papers removed. So much for the notion that legal dealings and the relationship between lawyer and client are confidential!

At time of writing, two full months after the search, no man on C Wing has yet had any of their stolen belongings returned nor been compensated for the destruction wrought by the regime during its 'revenge assault' on H5

■ By John Tumelty



BLOCK SHIFT

LOOMING DEADLINES cause editors to grow fretful, even desperate. The editor of *An Glór Gafa*, it should be noted, isn't the exception that proves the rule. Robustly indifferent to my wretched appearance — streaming eyes, clammy pallor, inflamed nostrils stuffed with sodden shirt-sleeves. The editor bluntly got to the point: "That article I asked you to write, your observations on the Block move after 'the tunnel', have it on my desk by midnight! Do you want a Lemsip?"

Seemingly, yet another symptom of summer flu is a mislaid capacity to respond with "I wonder would you go and ..." But I'm watching my precious allocation of words.

The background has been covered elsewhere but here's the gist. On Sunday 23 March 1997, a patrolling dog-handler chanced upon a really big hole in the ground, alarmingly close to the perimeter wall. Actually, he fell into it. A consequent, more professional inspection revealed a tunnel originating in H7. We, the luckless inhabitants of the said Block, were duly informed that a lock-down search was imminent. In fact, the search began at around midday, Monday the 24th. During the course of the day our suspicions were confirmed that the search teams intended to relocate us in H8, an adjacent Block in everyway identical to H7 except for the absence of a tunnel.

Prior to the search commencing, republican representatives sought and were given a written assurance that previously agreed 'full body search' procedures (NIO speak for 'strip searches') would be adhered to. Nevertheless, we knew to expect the worst. In one wing alone, C Wing, were men whose collective experience embraced every phase of prison struggle; Internment, the Burning of the camp, the Blanket years, attempted

forced integration with loyalists. Search procedures had evolved as a product of that history; their conduct, always contested, was the outcome of a constant battle to assert our dignity as political prisoners.

The procedure agreed entails that the prisoner first strips to his waist. The removed garments are examined by the searchers then handed back to the prisoner, who puts them on before stripping from the waist down except for his underpants. These, however, are neither removed or dropped, but pulled out at the waistband to reveal the 'crotch area'. As you may imagine, such searchers are always fraught with the possibility that over-zealous or vindictive screws will exceed their brief, assuming of course, that they haven't been ordered to do precisely that.

I suppose the jury is still out as to what happened on the day. A POA attempt to stir things up? Governor Smith getting a last dig in? Anyway, when my turn came for the strip-search, it very soon became apparent that the search teams — the word was that they were drafted in from Maghaberry and Magilligan, and therefore less accountable for their actions because less identifiable — wanted their kilo of flesh.

At the time, twenty four of us were held in C wing — a

full house. Out of that number, eight of us were ordered to drop our underpants. When we refused to comply we were again locked up while the search of the Block continued. So, by completion of that part of the task, eight of us were still behind the doors in C Wing.

The selection of the eight of us for special attention appears to have been arbitrary, at least in regard to C Wing. Our cells were in a cluster at the head of the wing, therefore, the first to be searched. Those searched after us followed the agreed instructions without being told to drop their underpants, and completed the move to H8 in batches, unmolested. The singling out of roughly a third of each wing's complement was repeated in all the Blocks searched, that day and on the Tuesday. This pattern does suggest an intention at collective nose-cutting that, to me, recalls the monthly early moaning raids by the Brits into internment cages. During those raids, a minimum of two men per cage were picked on for some imagined infringement and got a bit of a digging while spreadeagled against the wire. Two might not seem significant, but multiply that by the number of cages, seven, and by the average number of raids per cage per year, twelve, then the total of 168 men mistreated represented about a third of internees during any given year. Perhaps among the community of turkeys, the "third" is thought to possess a distinctive punitive value.

A particularly galling aspect of that day was overhearing through my locked door, Governor Smith lying to a woman from the BOV. He insisted to her that we had refused to comply with the established search procedure. I think he thought he was back in the Crum. Furthermore, he became quite

agitated — I imagined pale-faced — and railed at prisoners thinking they could dictate the running of prisons; all was about to change, he threatened.

Perhaps suspecting that he had overstepped the line, he appeared to drawback declaiming he would give us one more chance to comply.

We were again unlocked, individually, and asked would we now comply with the search orders. I replied that I would only comply with the procedure agreed beforehand. We were then left to stew, so to speak. Communicating with each other through the cell windows, it was accepted that the best course was no resistance when the IRF (Instant Reaction Force) moved in. To have resisted would have resulted in needless injury, possibly serious. Shortly after, the scuffling of boots, and shields, and other sounds peculiar to the presence of IRK squads, acted as a reminder of similar experiences in the past. Then the thought occurred to me that out of the eight of us there were young lads on remand who probably haven't undergone a forced strip-search.

I'm sure we all heard that first door unlock; the barked orders, then groans which seemed to move from the cell to the corridor. The cell next door was opened, barking and groaning ensued, this time directly outside my door. The command: 'On your knees; stand up!' The search lasted what seemed like ten minutes. One of the young remandees, obviously in some discomfort. I thought: 'I'm too old for this'. Then it was my turn.

You can be totally alone and connected to what is happening to the others. A necessary detachment. Then your door swings out and the already cramped cell is lost in thicket of size 12s, shields, blue



announced by a security SO's daft order that you stand back with our arms down your sides. He must have presumed I was now intimidatable because of the forced Block move. The doctor too his credit, appeared embarrassed. I approached him, raising my arms to show the swelling and discolourism from the wrist locks, more for the SO's benefit. In truth, my back hurt more from having to maintain the prolonged crouched over position. The doctor prescribed paracetamol.

When the circus had departed, I noticed for the first time that the searchers had replaced my underpants back to front. Had they wished to spare me the added indignity of dangling out of my shorts on the journey over? But, there is nothing as bare as a new cell. Especially when you put so much effort into 'personalising' your previous tenancy. You look around at the sparse furnishings, the bare walls, the chamber pot, at the total absence of any object connecting you to your life up 'till then: not a photo, not a letter. No radio, no clothes, all your property remains behind to be searched in H7.

More difficult to grapple with at this moment is the knowledge than a 'normal' regime may be a long time returning. When will you next have access to a phone? What about visits? The lock-down could last for weeks. Your loved ones will be frantic. It is always worse for them. And you realise that this train of anguish is replicated in every comrade's head this same night.

The next morning brings the realisation that things could have been far far worse. You've come through unscathed apart from a few bruises. You take heart from the alacrity with which other comrades begin the long process of gaining a measure of control over our lives once again. Mind you, there is the unseemly scuffle for the newspapers once they appear on the wing. But through it all solidarity prevails. Our jail community is alive and well.

fatigues and wasp-eye visored helmets. Underneath it all you're on your back pinned down by a shield. Head and wrist locks vanquish and recalcitrant notion of resistance. The pain from your wrists being forced down and simultaneously up your back is sharp and unrelenting, and explain, as if explanation were needed, the groans emanating earlier from the corridor. To complain is pointless and self-defeating, for you've learned that any supplications to the searchers better natures merely goats them into increasing the pressure. The pain is deliberate. Do you stay loose at the risk of importing the signal that there's room for an additional turn of the notch? Or do you resist and invite even further pressure, if that were possible? You cling to the line that the IRF will hold off from breaking your bones. But you are also aware of how vulnerable you are, and of how precarious is your reliance on their training, for one slip might result in serious injury to you, even death. You remember the man killed last year in Maghaberry during the same procedure. The search is

long and methodical. You take comfort from that for there are no sudden jerks or twists. The pain may be deliberate but it is also controlled. Finally, you are ordered into a crouched over position; wearing only your shorts and a T-Shirt, and, still restrained in the head and wrist locks, you are 'guided' along the corridor, through the grill gates and then through a gauntlet of feet in the 'circle' area; presumably there are the legs of the searches waiting on our removal before they begin their search of the cells. Another set of grill gates and then you feel the fresh air of the Block entrance yard. You are trickily manoeuvred into the back of a prison vain. At no time during the short journey are the head and wrist locks relaxed. Upon arrival at H8, a mirror-image journey through grilled gates, a reception committee composed from your truncated vantage, of legs only, then more gates. Then unexplainedly you are brought to a halt between the gates leading onto H8's C Wing. All I could see looking through my legs, was the

perfect angle afforded one of the IRF team should he have felt inclined to aim a kick at my aforementioned 'crotch area'. An uncomfortable moment, not quite 'reading' the motivations of those surrounding me.

Then you are in your new cell. You are ordered down on the floor. The IRF's *coup de grace* is to force your arms and legs to their limits up your back. It is excruciating and incapacitates you for the time it takes the IRF to exit from the cell and hopefully your life forever.

However, the ordeal isn't quite over, for during the next 20 minutes you are witness to the arrival of the comrades you have just left in H7. You hear their cries as the IRF administer their parting shot to each in turn, wondering whether you yelled as loud. But worse than the memory of your own pain is to have to endure the sounds of another man's. I'm not alone in this, because a chorus of frustrated anguish pours out of all the cells demanding that the IRF desist.

Shortly, a doctor attends each cell in turn. His arrival is

San Francisco Three at risk

AT PRESENT the H-Block Three: Barry Artt, Paul Brennan and Terry Kirby - are awaiting a judicial decision regarding an extradition warrant in the USA. These three republicans escaped from the H-Blocks in 1983. It is noteworthy to point out that the British, when issuing the extradition warrants, did not want to pursue the extradition on the issue of the escape.

The US courts had already recognised the legitimate right of republican POWs to secure their escape. In a ruling on my own escape from Crumlin Road Prison in 1981 the US rendered the escape as a political act. The British refused to appeal that decision and opted instead to pursue me via the Immigration Courts.

While Artt, Brennan and Kirby await a decision on their extradition, further concerns regarding their rights and safety have been raised in the wake of the discovery of the tunnel in H-Block 7 in March of this year. Such concerns are highlighted by the case of Jimmy Smyth who was extradited from San Francisco several months ago.

Jimmy Smyth's extradition was sought under the 1987 Supplement US/UK Extradition Treaty. Under pressure from the Thatcher government in response to my own extradition victory the new treaty had done away with the "political exemption clause" which protected political offenders. The new treaty was limited to a clause (Article 3A) which guaranteed human civil protection to those returned. The British government, represented by the H-Blocks' governor Baxter, stated at the Smyth hearing that Jimmy would not be punished, discriminated against or singled out for any punitive measures - particularly for taking part in the 1983 escape. The San Francisco Federal Court, wrongly, accepted the word of a British representative. Jimmy was returned to the H-Blocks.

The aftermath of the tunnel

discovery on 23 March was to expose Britain's deceit and total disregard for the safety of republicans who had been returned to the H-Blocks. Despite the guarantees given in the Federal Court regarding Jimmy's safety, the follow-up search and the conduct of the Riot Squads demonstrated in the starkest of terms the difference between British words in a US courtroom and the action of their vindictive and bigoted servants in the confines of a H-Block cell. Here there is no regard whatsoever for Article 3A.

Jimmy Smyth is housed in D Wing, H-Block 4, which is not even in the same phase as H-Block 7. It was five days before the search team reached H4, D Wing. In the meantime all republicans were on a total lock-down - each locked in his own cell. A Block search just prior to the discovery of the tunnel had been carried out in H4. In addition a specialist technical search of walls and floors during the five days of lock-down had shown that H-Block 4 was secure. The search procedure on D Wing should have been routine: men would be searched and taken to the canteen while a search was made of their cells. The established routine - which was an agreed method between the prison administration and the prisoners' representatives - related also to the way in which strip-searches were conducted. Republican prisoners were not to remove their underpants or lower them to a degree which meant humiliation and degradation of the prisoner. What should

have been a routine search turned instead into a convenient excuse for the venting of loyalist hatred and violence against republican POWs. The arrival of the search team onto the wing was a hint of what was to follow. Their entrance was accompanied by sectarian whistling and British Army war tunes. This created tensions on the wing and paved the way for the upcoming punishment of POWs.

It soon became obvious that the use of strip-search was to be the tactic through which certain men were to be singled out for punishment. All 24 republican prisoners on D Wing conducted themselves in the same unified manner when complying with the strip-search. But the search team selected ten men who they claimed had refused to take down their underpants - even though this was a breach of the agreement, and the 14 other prisoners on the wing were not asked to take their underpants down. The ten were therefore selected for special treatment, having complied with them to the agreed degree. The Riot Squad was immediately called in.

Jimmy Smyth and myself were two of those selected. Why the both of us were part of this group of ten to be selected for special treatment (ill-treatment) is open to speculation. We had asked to see a senior officer or governor to find out why such a selection was taking place. We were denied all contact and were forced to wait on the Riot Squad.

While the search team vacated the Block the Riot Squad wearing helmets with darkened visors to ensure anonymity, body armour and armed with batons and shields commenced to take over D Wing. Without warning the Riot Squad charged into Jimmy Smyth's cell, forcing Jimmy to the

ground. The violent *modus operandi* involved applying pressure to the wrists and arms. Although Jimmy, as with all republican prisoners, did not put up any resistance the Riot Squad continued with their pain-seeking frenzy. Jimmy was held in a crab-like position on the floor with his legs and arms pulled up behind his back and then he was trailed out onto the wing landing. Jimmy was then violently and forcibly stripped.

Despite having sustained injuries to his arms the Riot Squad continued to hold Jimmy in the crab-like position. He was carried off to the 'punishment block' with nine other men. Being neither questioned about or charged with any infraction of rules or regulations all men were brought back to D Wing the following day, only to find that not only had their cells been ransacked but personal materials had been stolen.

Soon afterwards the republican prisoners' staff took statements from those who had suffered physical abuse and injury. A statement was then released by the Republican Movement which was picked up by some media in the USA, particularly the San Francisco newspapers. Typically the British propaganda machine swung into action.

In response to the San Francisco news report on Jimmy Smyth's injuries, the British consulate in New York City issued a statement denying that any such incident occurred at all! However, within a week, following an article in the *San Francisco Irish American Herald*, Kevin Cook of the British consulate in San Francisco released a statement now admitting that an incident did occur but continued with a blatant distortion of the facts. The statement from Cook was an attempt to stop the evidence of Jimmy's injuries getting



BARRY ARTT

beginning of April admitted that Jimmy was, "logically chosen, among others..." This meant because of the 1983 escape!

In a weak attempt to explain away Jimmy's injuries, Cook stated that Jimmy physically resisted the Riot Squad. Cook accused Jimmy of creating a situation to "garner the headlines". Cook's attempt at black propaganda flew in the face of the facts.

Although the Artt, Brennan and Kirby hearing was finished, the US Federal Court judge did allow a one-day re-opening of the case to hear evidence on the H-Block assaults. Affidavits were submitted from Jimmy Smyth, POW representatives and myself. During this hearing the British government whilst under oath did not accuse Jimmy of acting out the injuries or indeed accuse him of putting up any form of resistance to the Riot Squad. Cook's statement was deemed a propaganda lie to hide the facts of physical abuse and vindictive selection because of Jimmy's political and legal profile.

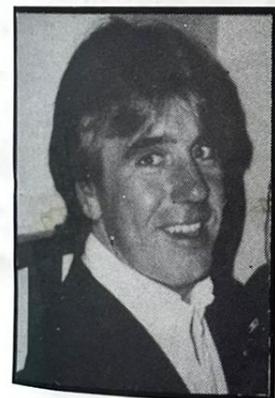
It is obvious that what took place in the H-Block in the aftermath of the tunnel discovery on 23 March 1997 should have an influence on the San Francisco extradition case. Article 3A of the US/UK Treaty gives protection to Irish republican extraditees. The British have flouted and abused constitutional and international law. Jimmy Smyth's part in the highly published, and, for the British, embarrassing escape in 1983 has followed Jimmy to this day. The US Federal Court should take into account what the consequences are for an extraditee.

While republican escapes have a renowned culture and are recognised as legitimate political acts the British see those who partake in them as targets for attack. Therefore, Artt, Brennan and Kirby should not be returned to the British penal system. They would clearly be at risk.

■ By Joe Docherty



PAUL BRENNAN



TERRY KIRBY

into the US Federal Courts and the case of Artt, Brennan and Kirby. The attack on Jimmy Smyth and the resulting injuries would be important to that case. It would prove that the extradition of republicans into the British penal system would put their rights and safety at serious risk.

Cook's statement at the

REVIEW : FROM FETTERS TO FREEDOM by Micheal Mac Uileagoid. Sasta Press, Belfast 1996. Price £6.99

This book gives a very detailed account of escapes and escape attempts by Irish political prisoners. It begins with the 16th Century Irish Chieftain Red Hugh O'Donnell who at the age of fifteen was held by the English as a hostage for three-and-a-half years before escaping, only to be handed back by a "friend" from whom he sought help. He did, however, celebrate the New Year of 1599 with a successful escape from Dublin Castle.

The book covers the various stages of Irish history where resistance against oppression has brought death and captivity for the Irish people. Incarceration has taken many forms: prison camps, jails, prison ships, exile to 'Van Dieman's Land' and other parts of the now demolished British Empire. There are accounts from the 1798 Rebellion, and an attempted escape in 1801 from one of two ships the Hercules and the Atlas which were en route to the colonies of Australia with a cargo of Irish prisoners. In more recent times ships still feature, with the story of "The Magnificent Seven" - the title of a song written to celebrate the successful escape of seven internees from the prison ship *The Maidstone*, in 1972.

The internees in the Curragh in 1922 also demonstrated the desire to take their leave when 141 men tunnelled their way to freedom. Unfortunately throughout its history the Free State has continued to imprison republicans but on the bright side these same republicans have given us some of our most dramatic and ingenious escapes which are destined to be told and retold in story and song.

Throughout the history of escapes everything imaginable has been used - from prison bed linen to the famous helicopter which dropped into Mountjoy in '73 and the now equally famous food lorry which exited a H-Block ten years later and deposited its cargo of 38 at the front gate of the Kesh.

I know some people are sceptical by nature but even the sceptics must agree that it takes a certain degree of commitment and determination to achieve or even to attempt what is outlined in the accounts of this book. At times they might seem incredible but they are nonetheless factual.

People might find themselves wondering why so many republican prisoners took such risks against such odds to try to effect their escape. They have not only the desire to be free from their captors but consider it their duty to get out and return to the struggle, despite the certain hardships, the high possibility of recapture and indeed death. But they are simply driven by the same forces which compels thousands to resist in a thousand ways on a daily basis, ie the absolute refusal to accept injustice and repression. We know that imprisonment is not only in the prison camps and jails of our enemies but is experienced by those who are locked within a statelet in which they are denied equal rights and murdered when they push for them.

This struggle for justice does not end after imprisonment but continues in many forms. In particular the struggle in jail has taken the form of protests and hunger strikes for political status which has obvious ramifications for the wider struggle. Prison protest is also aimed at improving conditions so that, for example, POWs can improve their education through classes and discussion groups, thus becoming a greater asset to the struggle in their communities upon release from jail. But the ultimate form of struggle in jail, and the best blow that imprisoned republicans can strike is to carry out a successful escape.

This book, *From Fetters To Freedom*, bears testimony to the courage and resilience of Irish prisoners over several centuries of oppression. On 25 March 1997, today's generation of captured republicans added yet another chapter to the history of escapes.

The Spirit of Freedom lives on.

■ By Derek Sweetman

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