

THE ESCAPE



*Hugh
McAteer*

2017 marks the centenary of Hugh McAteer's birth, in Derry, in August 1917.

His own account of his time as Chief of Staff of the Irish Republican Army was published in a number of places. I've taken the version published in 1951 by the *Sunday Independent* and created a pdf version of it for easy access, since the account has not been reproduced in full elsewhere. I've also included two obituaries from the time of his death in 1970, one from the *Ulster Herald* and the other from *Republican News*, which he had recently re-established. You can read a longer biographical treatment in the *Ulster Herald* obituary.

Some additional news reports of his episodes in his life have been included, where appropriate. These illustrate either specific events, or, such as the coverage of his and Nora's wedding, an insight into the extent to which he was actually a public figure. A speech given in Fermanagh in 1952 is also included as an example of his public activity after his release from prison.

His premature death, leaving behind a young family, at only 52 years of age, was no doubt down to the long periods he spent in prison between 1936 and 1950, including at least one hunger strike of over forty days duration, in 1944. He is buried in Milltown cemetery in Belfast, although he is not (as yet) commemorated on the republican plot there.

Produced by Treason Felony Blog.

STORY OF GELIGNITE FIND

Two Men For Trial In Derry
Case: Father And Three
Sons Discharged

REMARKABLE DOCUMENT

THE IRISH PRESS, THURSDAY, JULY 23, 1936.

EVIDENCE of the finding of 68½ sticks of gelignite, 60½ yards of fuse, firearms and ammunition, and a remarkable document, said to relate to the I.R.A. and to be addressed to "Training Officer, No. 3 Area, Ulster," was given when the six Derry men, arrested during the police raids in the city last Friday, appeared on remand at the local police court yesterday, on charges of illegal possession of firearms and explosives. Extracts from the document, which was dated February 26, 1936, were—

"Teach every volunteer how to handle Thompson gun. As training advances give volunteers lessons on simple tactical exercises. Tell them steps to be taken for attack on enemy posts. I am surprised you cannot secure some rifles in the city with a big enemy military garrison. Surely it should be possible to get contacts with enemy troops. For this purpose take only best types of volunteers."

When the case was called it was announced that, by direction of the Attorney-General, proceedings against four of the accused—**Hugh McAteer** (sen.), dock labourer, 76 William Street, Derry, and three of his four sons, **Edward Gerard McAteer**, President of the Derry Junior Chamber of Commerce and Income Tax Officer; **Daniel McAteer**, unemployed, and **John McAteer**, a pupil at the Christian Brothers' School, Derry, would be withdrawn.

The other accused, Hugh McAteer, Jun., and Thomas Carlin, timber-yard worker, 61 St. Columb's Wells, were returned for trial in custody at the City Assizes, which opened yesterday.

A large crowd gathered in the vicinity of the Court to watch the arrival of the prisoners, two of whom, Hugh McAteer Jun., and Thomas Carlin, were handcuffed to each other. The public were excluded from the Court, which was closely guarded by police.

Hugh McAteer Senr., and his sons, Daniel, Edward and John were discharged.

Mr. A. Robb, for Edward McAteer, said he trusted that as his client left the court without a stain on his character, his bright career in the service of the Crown would be in no way prejudiced.

Head Constable Dempsey said that that morning he further charged

Carlin with having in his possession an explosive substance. Carlin replied: "you got it off me and that is all I can say."

Further police evidence was given that when Carlin's house was searched last Friday three revolvers and an old horse pistol and some documents were found in a press.

BANNED NEWSPAPERS

Sergt. Clements said that that day he further charged Hugh McAteer, jun., with having in his possession or control 68½ sticks of gelignite and about 60½ yards of fuse under such circumstances as to give rise to reasonable suspicion that he did not have them for a lawful object. When cautioned McAteer said: "I admit responsibility for the stuff mentioned in the various charges."

On searching the McAteers' house last Friday, the Sergeant proceeded, he found copies of Republican newspapers—"An Phoblacht" and "Flanna"—in the kitchen. On the ground floor he found concealed in a sofa a fully loaded five-chamber revolver, a box containing seven rounds of ammunition, and a stick of gelignite. In a room upstairs he found documents relating to the I.R.A. and some envelopes addressed "O.C. of No. 3 Area."

Asked if he wished to question the Sergeant, the accused said: "I ask the Sergeant no questions. As a soldier of the Republic I deny the authority of this Court to try me."

Const. Shaw said that in an attic he found the gelignite and some banned newspapers, "The Northman," "The Nation," "Eire," "The Bulletin" (Easter Week edition), and a membership card of the Gaelic League.

Const. McConnell said he found five ordnance maps relating to the city of Derry and district and a duplicating Machine in a room upstairs. It had been used recently.

Sunday Independent

The Escape Of Hugh McAteer

One Of The Greatest Man-hunts Ever

The Escape Of Hugh McAteer

£3,000 On His Head

ONE of the greatest man-hunts ever staged by the police in the Six Counties began on the morning of January 15, 1943, when the sensational news reached the Belfast authorities that Hugh McAteer, the 26-year-old Chief of Staff of the I.R.A., who had been undergoing a 15-year term of imprisonment, and three other prominent I.R.A. men had escaped from Belfast's grim century-old prison and had "disappeared."

Puzzled by the cleverness of the jail break, and sorely embarrassed by the world-wide publicity which it received—the B.B.C. gave it pride of place with the latest war news and even the Nazi Radio broadcast the news—the Stormont authorities

offered a reward of £3,000 for information leading to the recapture of McAteer and his comrades, and immediately set about holding an inquiry into an escape which had caught the imagination of the public.

They did more. The entire police force of the North, augmented by thousands of Specials, armed with rifles and Sten guns, patrolled the streets, searched houses, held up cars, interrogated passengers in trams and buses, and even peered into bread-vans. All exits from the City were blocked, and that night in the gloom of the war-time black-out American and British soldiers walking

through the streets of Belfast were stopped and scrutinised by the light of police torches.

The search went on for weeks. Railway and bus stations were watched, but neither McAteer, dubbed "Will o' the Wisp" and "Scarlet Pimpernel" by American newspapers, nor any of his fellow escapees could be traced, and nobody came forward to claim the reward, which was emblazoned, together with photographs of the wanted men, on the notice-boards of every police station throughout the Six Counties.

The manner in which the escape was contrived remained a mystery soon to develop into a legend, for the authorities

never revealed the truth. Now that the events of those days have become chapters in the stormy history of Belfast and the North, the "Sunday Independent" can tell the whole inside story of this dramatic prison-break, the circumstances leading up to it, and the exciting aftermath, when four fugitives whom police had orders to shoot on sight if necessary, ran the gauntlet of a relentless pursuit.

This epic story now told in his own words, in tense, thrilling detail, by the chief actor in the drama, Hugh McAteer, will appear in serial form in the "Sunday Independent" beginning on next Sunday.



Sunday Independent, 23rd March, 1951

TO-DAY the "Sunday Independent" presents the first instalment of Hugh McAteer's own story of his dramatic escape from Belfast Jail on January 15, 1943, and of one of the greatest manhunts ever staged by the police in the Six Counties to apprehend the 26-year-old Republican leader, and three other prominent men who escaped with him.

NONE OF THE ESCAPEES COULD BE TRACED. A MYSTERY BECAME A LEGEND. THE AUTHORITIES NEVER DISCLOSED THE TRUTH ABOUT THE SENSATIONAL JAIL BREAK.

NOW Hugh McAteer reveals it himself in startling, thrilling detail. Start this story to-day.

Sunday Independent, April 1, 1951

★

An Epic Story Starts To-Day

★

DRAMATIC EVENTS LED UP TO NORTH'S GREAT JAIL BREAK
**HOW McATEER WAS CAUGHT
BY A POLICE RUSE**

A Dozen Voices Roared: "Put Up Your Hands!"

SUNDAY, August 30, 1942, opened a tragic and eventful week in Belfast. Six men lay under sentence of death in Crumlin Jail, and were to die on the following Wednesday morning.

The crisis that had been looming for months now seemed at hand. Throughout the North, and particularly in the Nationalist districts of Belfast, a feeling of tension prevailed, for people anticipated that the coming hangings would lead to further trouble.

And the Northern authorities knew it also, and showed that they knew, for, in Belfast,

Police
with
Rifles

the Republican areas were heavily patrolled by police armed with rifles and automatic weapons. Armoured cars and whippet tanks, with their Lewis guns swinging menacingly from side to side, patrolled the streets. Raiding parties of uniformed and plain-clothes police, with rifles at the ready, swept past in cage-cars. And serving with the Royal Ulster Constabulary were more than 1,300 "B" Specials.

* * *

ON that Sunday there was a constant stream of visitors coming to see me, among them being Gerard O'Callaghan, who called on his way to an arms dump at Hannahstown.

In the early afternoon I left to interview some country colleagues, and later returned to find a message waiting for me.

Five of the six condemned men had been reprieved. Tom Williams alone

His Last Letter

would die, and die with the cool, passionless courage that would force a tribute even from his jailers. That death in the cause of freedom held no terrors for him he showed quite clearly in his last letter to me:

"It is beyond the powers of my humble intellect to describe the pride of my comrades in knowing that they are going to follow in the footsteps of those who have given their lives to Ireland and the Republic, to describe the courage and coolness shown when sentenced to death. . . . My only regret now is that I will not be with you in the fight, and the last stage of Ireland's battle for freedom."

* * *

ON Sunday night and Monday morning raiding on Republican homes reached an even higher level of intensity. Within a stone's throw from where I was staying many houses were raided, and I stood for a while at my window watching a party at work in a house across the street.

On Monday afternoon Gerard O'Callaghan arrived as I was about to sit down to my dinner. He had

***Was
Shot
Dead***

been busy all that day and the night before, and was now hurrying out to finish his work at the Hannahstown dump, without even waiting to have a meal. I refused to let him go without taking something and, sitting down to my dinner, he finished it in a few minutes, and hurried out of the house with the words, "I won't be back to-night."

And he wasn't. Within the hour he was dead.

All the arms at Hannahstown were in the hands of the R.U.C. and a number of men captured.

O'Callaghan's body was put into a lorry, and lay there all night until taken to Lisburn the following morning. Afterwards it was brought to St. Paul's Church, Belfast, where it remained for a day and a night, and there I went to pay a last tribute to my dead comrade.

As I stood by his coffin I remembered his avowed intention of entering a religious Order no matter whether success or failure attended our present efforts for freedom. And, knowing him as I did, I saw nothing unusual in his resolve.

ON Wednesday morning, September 2,
Tom Williams was hanged, despite

*Campaign
for
Reprieve*

an intensive reprieve
campaign, in which
help was forthcoming
from unexpected
quarters both North
and South of the Bor-
der, and in which a life-
long constitutionalist
like the late T. J.

Campbell played a generous part.

Within an hour of the death of
Williams a police patrol at Cullyhanna,
Co. Armagh, was captured and disarmed,
and a police car destroyed. From then
onwards to the end of the year attacks
on police patrols and barracks continued
intermittently.

* * *

THE SPIRIT OF AN IRISH SOLDIER.

We reproduce here a letter which was sent to the Chief of Staff, whom he knew personally, by Lieutenant Tom Williams. It is not necessary to comment on the spirit of the letter, or the courage of Lieut. Williams, his faith and fortitude and belief in his country's cause, has amazed all fair-minded people in the world. Lieut Williams realized, that in the words, "To all true Irishmen on earth, arrest and death come late or soon", was the true rule that all Irishmen should abide by until the Republic was finally and completely established. The following is a complete reproduction of the letter:-

Hugh a chara,

Just a note to let you know how my comrades and I are getting along. I do not expect an answer as your letter to Joe serves us all in that respect.

I am proud to know that you are our leader. My comrades and I are sure that you will use your utmost powers to free our dear beloved country, and bring about the re-establishment of the Republic and its constitution.

It is beyond the powers of my humble intellect, to describe the pride of my comrades in knowing that they are going to follow in the footsteps of those who have given their lives to Ireland and the Republic, to describe the courage and coolness shown when sentenced to death. As Joe has previously stated to you our sorrow in not being able to attack the court and the "Northern" Junta, it is not necessary for me to go into it here. But you now know the reason.

My God, can we tell you and our comrades who will carry on the fight, can we tell you of the gladness and joy that is in our hearts. To know that the Irish people are again united, aye, and well may England quake, Ireland's awake, Ireland's awake. After twenty years of slumber our Nation will once again strike, please God, at the despoilers who have infringed the Nation's liberty, freedom, and murdered her sons and daughters; who have given us a foreign tongue; shall please God, strike and strike hard and make the tyrants

go on their knees for mercy and forgiveness.

But shall we make the mistake of '21. No, No, 'tis men like you and your staff will see to it that no farcical so-called treaty shall in any way be signed by a bunch of weak-kneed and willed Irishmen. Better that the waves of the mighty oceans sweep over Eire than take and divide our Nation, and murder her true sons again. Better would it be that the heavens should open and send fire to destroy Eire, than to accept another treaty like it.

In writing this, dear Hugh, do not think that I am saying it to you merely, or the gallant soldiers of OGLAIGH NA h-EIREANN; it is from my heart I say it to the weak willed and credulous Irishmen who may put any trust in England. My only regret now, is that I will not be with you in the fight, and the last stage of Ireland's battle for freedom. But, with the help of God and His Blessed Mother, we may be in heaven looking down upon our dear, beloved, tortured, crucified Eire; and looking with pride on the men and women who will carry on the fight until victory.

Well, dear Hugh, I will close with this message to OGLAIGH NA h-EIREANN; CARRY ON NO MATTER WHAT ODDS ARE AGAINST YOU; CARRY ON NO MATTER WHAT THE ENEMY CALL YOU; CARRY ON NO MATTER WHAT TORMENTS ARE INFLICTED ON YOU. THE ROAD TO FREEDOM IS PAVED WITH SUFFERING, HARDSHIP, AND TORTURE. CARRY ON MY GALLANT COMRADES UNTIL THAT CERTAIN DAY.

Your comrade in Ireland's cause,

Lieutenant Tom Williams,
Belfast Battalion,
OGLAIGH NA h-EIREANN.

Mother Eire! let him sleep

In the warmth of thy embrace.

May we who follow him, still keep

Alive the honour of our race.

"LET YE VENTURE YOUR ALL, LEST YE LOSE WHAT IS MORE THAN ALL.

YE SHALL ASK FOR A MIRACLE TAKING CHRIST FOR HIS WORD.

A WEEK after the hanging in Crumlin I was shocked to hear that our publicity premises on the Crumlin Road had been raided and, after a gun-battle, John Graham, David Fleming and Sean Dynan, the tenant of the house, had been captured. A complete issue of our paper, "Republican News," ready for distribution, was seized.

Immediately the news was received, those men who were staying with me started on the job of turning out another edition of the seized paper. Working all night behind heavily blacked-out windows, and, with the sound of police lorries frequently in our ears, the re-

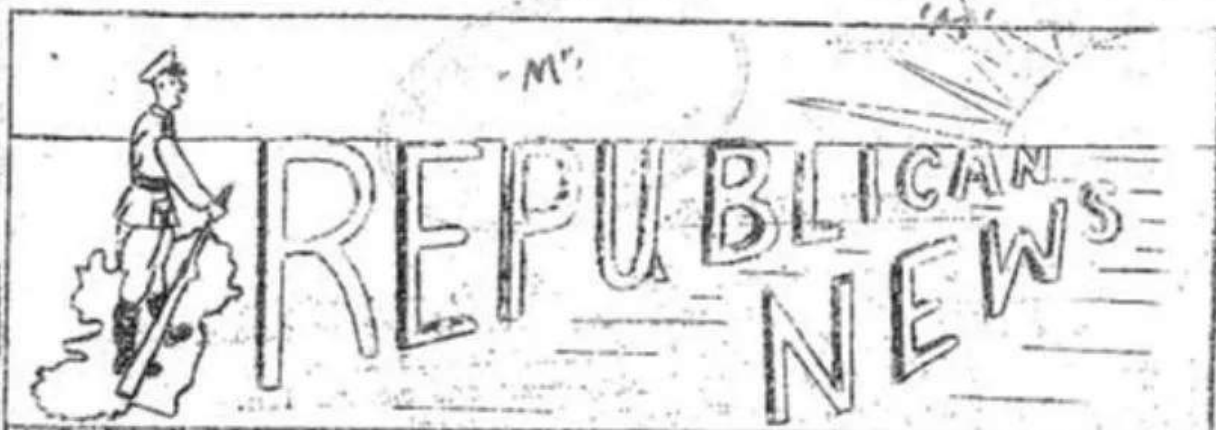
**6,000
Copies
Printed**

printing of some 6,000 copies was completed before morning. We had the satisfaction of seeing the September issue of "Republican News" in the hands of our distributing agents dead on schedule.

The Northern authorities were so completely astounded that they neglected to take their usual precautions to prevent the distribution of the paper.

Police officers admitted that, whilst they considered the reappearance of "Republican News" likely enough, they never dreamt that it could possibly be in circulation again within twenty-four hours. The foresight that had insisted on maintaining a skeleton Publicity Staff was completely vindicated.

* * *



Issued by the Republican Publicity Bureau, BELFAST.
Number 5. September 1942.

Soldiers and Citizens of the Republic.

Once again our land has been plunged in mourning. Once again the bandit of the world has struck. Two fresh names have been added to England's long list of murders; two more names have been inscribed forever on Ireland's roll of honour.

We grieve for the fallen brave; gallant Lieut. Tom Williams, murdered in Belfast gaol on September 2nd, 1942, and fearless Staff-Lieut. Gerard O'Callaghan, killed in action on the 31st, Aug, 1942. But though we grieve, our hearts are filled with pride, pride in the magnificent courage with which they died, pride in the cause which calls forth such glorious sacrifices.

Citizens and Soldiers of the Republic, I ask you to renew your allegiance and re-dedicate your lives to the achievement of the Republic; I ask you to steel your hearts with the resolve that nothing that the enemy may do or say shall cause us to become disheartened or to abandon the struggle. But, neither the passions of the people, nor the fiery demand for action of the Volunteers, will make the Army authorities enter into hasty or unplanned action. The time has come for a disciplined effort to establish the Independence and Freedom of Ireland.

Hugh McAteer,

Chief of Staff.

The September 1942 edition of Republican News produced overnight by the Belfast Irish Republican Publicity Bureau staff.

DURING the rest of September, police activity against the Belfast Republicans mounted in intensity. Thousands

***Prams
Were
Searched***

were stopped daily in the Falls area, and even women wheeling perambulators were not immune, their perambulators being subject to frequent search. On a number of occasions I was challenged for my identity card, but, being a comparative newcomer to Belfast, very few police or "Specials" knew me, or, if they did know me, gave no indication of their knowledge.

Towards the end of the month I met a policeman whom I had known as a schoolboy in my native Derry. He recognised me and greeted me warmly. Accepting his invitation, I went to his house, where we spent a pleasant hour recalling memories of our home town. As I was leaving he urged me to call again in a week's time, when he promised he would have some really useful information for me.

* * *

THE very next week curfew was clamped down on a very considerable area of Nationalist Belfast, an area in which we were given almost one hundred per cent support.

On the night of September 6 I took with me my comrade, Gerald O'Reilly,

***"Put Up
Your
Hands"***

and together we hurried through the blacked-out streets to the house of my police school-mate. In the pitch darkness we had difficulty in making our way, but eventually we found the right house

and, turning up the little path, knocked at the door. As we waited for an answer a slight scuffling sound behind caused us to spin round and we found ourselves blinking in the midst of a circle of blazing electric torches. A dozen voices roared at us: "Put up your hands," and, as we raised our hands, someone kept repeating: "Don't move now or we'll shoot. Don't move now." We didn't move.

One Secret That McAteer Will Not Reveal!

From J. J. KELLY,
"Sunday Independent" Belfast Representative

Sunday Independent, April 8, 1951

FEW newspaper articles have excited such widespread interest in the Six Counties as the personal story of Hugh McAteer, one-time I.R.A. Chief of Staff, and "Will o' the Wisp." Everyone, from the people who hid him in their homes during his period "on the run" to the police who sought him here, there, and everywhere, are reading the story with avid interest.

McAteer tells me that there is one matter on which he must disappoint his readers, and that is the story of the Underground Post at Belfast Prison. "My lips must remain sealed concerning that matter," he said, "although I am sure there are a good many people who would give their right-eye to know how the Republican prisoners continued to communicate with the outside world from behind the prison walls."

DETAILS OF SCENES

A remarkable example of the efficiency of the secret post occurred one afternoon at Stormont when Mr. Harry Diamond, M.P., caught the then Minister of Home Affairs napping by describing in full detail scenes which had occurred in the prison that very

morning, when prisoners protested about food and other treatment they were receiving. The Minister had not at that stage received any intimation of the events in prison, but later discovered that Mr. Diamond had the correct information.

Great efforts were made after that to prevent clandestine correspondence coming out from the political prisoners but all efforts to wipe out the Underground Post failed.

**(Hugh McAteer's story is on
Page Three to-day)**

Prisoners Decide On Way To Escape

Second Instalment

THIS is the second instalment of Hugh McAteer's own story of his dramatic escape from Belfast Jail on January 15, 1943, and of one of the greatest manhunts ever staged by the police in the Six Counties to apprehend the 26-year-old Republican leader and three others who escaped with him.

Sunday Independent, April 8, 1951

Trapped, Then
Handcuffed

Cheered By The
Prisoners

RAIDS and hold-ups were everyday occurrences in Belfast in September, 1942. Tension had grown after the execution of Tom Williams. Hugh McAteer was a "wanted" man, but he had succeeded in eluding capture. One day he met a policeman whom he had known as a schoolboy in his native Derry and accepted an invitation to visit his home. They spent a pleasant time together recalling memories, and the policeman asked him to call again in a week's time. Accompanied by a colleague, McAteer again visited the house, but this time found himself surrounded, a dozen voices shouting "Put up your hands." Now read on.

Sentenced To Fifteen
Years

Found Unlocked
Trapdoor

FOR a full couple of minutes we stood there, and, as our eyes grew accustomed to the glare, I could see the light glinting on the barrels of levelled revolvers. I glanced at Gerry and noted the familiar, tiny smile at the corner of his mouth.

Then a revolver was pressed against my right temple, hands felt in my pockets for a gun that was not there, handcuffs snapped on my wrists, and I was a prisoner of the R.U.C.

As we were marched through the streets to the headquarters of the Political Branch in University Avenue, one of our escort taunted us with walking so unsuspectingly into the trap laid for us. And in my heart I had to admit that I had been grossly careless.

What Was in Store For Us

I COULD not help wondering what was in store for us. But I felt little fear, only a sense of exasperation at the circumstances of my capture, and a burning curiosity as to what the future held.

In the early hours of the morning, after fruitless efforts to question us, we were taken from Political Branch H.Q. through the blacked-out streets.

The R.U.C. had treated us with obvious courtesy, one police officer remarking, with studied casualness, "You see, we are not as bad as your propaganda paints us."

Interview With Police Officer

WE spent a most uncomfortable night in the coldness of the cells at the City Police Office. Early the following morning a senior police officer was shown into my cell. After inquiring how I slept and sympathising with me on the cheerless surroundings, he said:

"I hope nothing happens to that young fellow."

"What young fellow?" I asked.

"The man you were trying to suborn."

"Well, I won't do him much harm here."

"Does that mean he will be safe?" he inquired.

"From me, anyway, it seems."

"What about the boys outside, will you see that they don't do anything to him?"

"I'll do nothing of the kind. And, anyway, as you know quite well, a Volunteer officer loses his rank and position the moment he is captured."

"But you would have a lot of influence yet with the boys," he urged.

"Perhaps," I answered, "but I certainly don't intend using it in this case."

"I would be very sorry to see that young man come to any harm."

"But wouldn't he have the great consolation of knowing that he had done his duty?" I replied.

"Then you won't do anything for him at all?" he finally asked.

"No."

"Well, good-bye"

"Good-bye."

Arrival at the Prison

LATER in the day Gerry and I were taken under heavy guard to Crumlin Road Jail. During the evening we

heard the news of our arrival being shouted from cell to cell and wing to wing. And then from the window of a nearby cell a voice burst out in the song, "The Three Flowers."

All other voices were stilled until the singer had finished, and then came a great heart-stirring clarion call, "Up the Republic," followed by a cheer from the hundreds of Republican prisoners. Into my mind came the words of that moving tribute to Easter Week, and I quoted:

*"There is no rope can strangle
song,
And not for long death takes
its toll;
No prison bars can dim the
stars,
Nor quicklime eat the living
soul."*

Gerry made no comment for a long time, and then with a sigh he said:

"It's all over now, Hugh; we're just a pair of jail martyrs."

But a jail martyr was exactly what I had no intention of becoming.

Denied Visits and Letters

FOR six weeks I was held on detention, without either charge or internment order being served on me, and denied all visits and letters, that is, all "official" letters for, of course, I maintained communication with my friends and comrades outside. When the third week had passed I was convinced that there would be no internment for me, and that the authorities were most likely working on some charge against me that would mean a long sentence of imprisonment.

But I was resolved not to submit quietly to a long term in jail;

for, in addition to the natural desire for personal freedom, I felt a boiling-point exasperation at the circumstances of my capture and at the smug assumption of my captors that, once in their hands, I was now *hors-de-combat* for as long as they pleased.

Furthermore, it was obvious that the morale of our supporters had been considerably shaken by the arrest of so many leaders, and I was convinced that a successful escape would go a long way to restore the spirit of our followers to its traditional level.

More Prisoners Every Day

THERE were already in the Penal Servitude Division of the Jail almost one hundred political prisoners, with more arriving daily, and among those already there were many I knew personally.

I felt that I could easily get enough to share in the adventure with me, and a great many others who would gladly co-operate. Added to this was the knowledge that the jailers appeared to be relying largely on the physical obstacles in the way of escaping from such a strongly built prison, fronting on a main thoroughfare.

Thus it was that when on November 20 I stood in the dock of Belfast Courthouse I could not suppress a smile when I heard the judge pronounce sentence of fifteen years' imprisonment. I believed it more than possible to shorten that term considerably.

Secured Hack-Saw Blades

I HAD no illusions about the difficulty of the task in front of me. I had already spent more than five years in that part of the jail, and I knew what had to be contended with; cell walls more than three feet thick, heavily barred windows with the glass itself set in a steel frame; a twenty-foot wall surrounded the front garden, which itself was overlooked by warders' sleeping quarters and the prison administrative offices, an armed guard at that wall, and beyond that again a row of warders' cottages with a police patrol on the Crumlin Road.

I was fully aware that there had been only two successful escapes from that

part of the prison in more than twenty years.

But an attempt must be made and made soon. With that in mind, while still on detention, I had sent out to some friends in Belfast for half a dozen first-class hack-saw blades, and these had duly arrived via the famous "line of communication," that for years was a puzzle, as it still is, to the Northern authorities.

A Hunger - Strike Rumour

BEFORE any plans could be made, it was first of all necessary to secure the approval of the staff of the republican prisoners. This proved much easier than I had expected, and not alone was the idea approved but fullest co-operation was promised and forthcoming.

All staff meetings had to be held during the exercise hour under the watchful eyes of the warders, and for security reasons we circulated the rumour that we were planning a hunger-strike. This had the expected effect, and very shortly there was a noticeable relaxation of the vigilance of the warders.

Two important decisions were now taken, but only after long discussion. First of all, we would not seek any co-operation in our plans from the jail staff, for a chance word would be enough to imperil our lives.

Decided Not to Use Cars

THE second decision was not to use cars to get away from the prison, for this would have entailed the active assistance of our comrades outside, and we realised that, as things then were, they had quite enough on their hands. We intended to do this job ourselves.

Furthermore, strange cars in the vicinity of Crumlin at that stage of the war, when cars were so scarce, would probably have aroused suspicion.

How lucky we were in thus dispensing with cars was revealed later when, shortly after the escape, one of the houses we would certainly have used, had cars been available, was searched from top to bottom in one of the "block-raids" that Belfast then experienced.

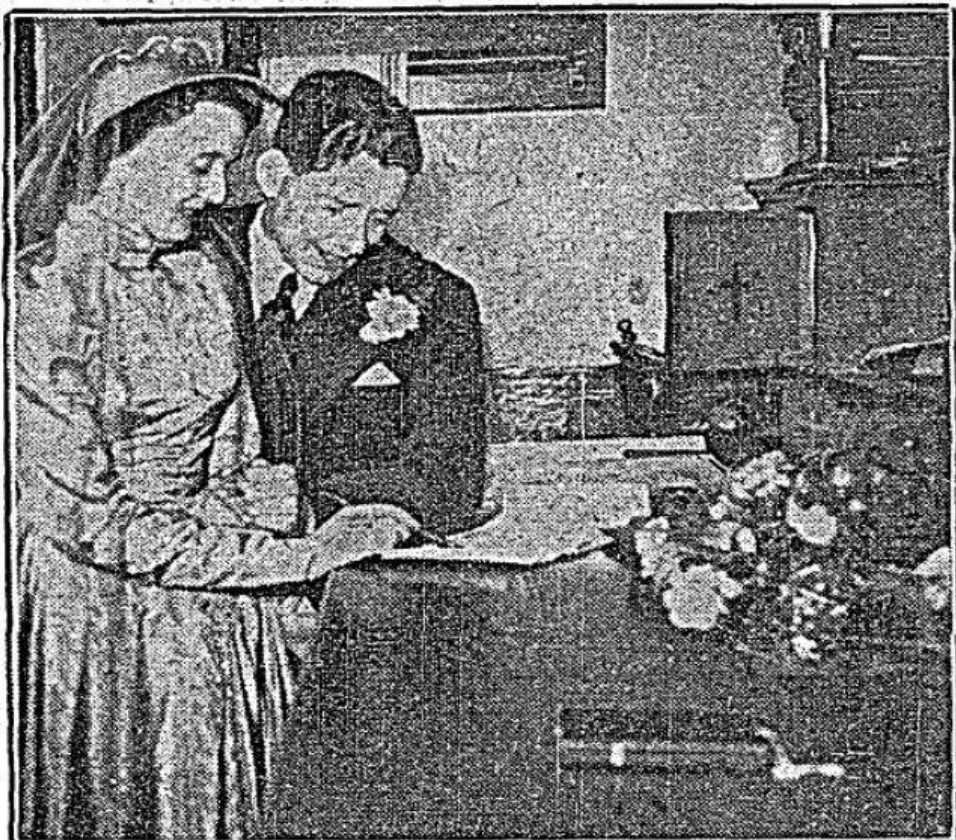
Cutting Through Rafters

MEANWHILE we proceeded to examine various possible ways of escape and had finally decided on cutting through the bars of a cell window, when it was reported to me that in the ceiling of one of the lavatories in the top tier there was an unlocked trap-door.

This seemed so promising that, two of our men were sent to investigate, and whilst one of them kept watch the other climbed through the trap-door. He returned to report that the trap-door gave access to the roof-space above the penal servitude cell-block, that the roof was of the ordinary type, rafter, laths and slates, and was not specially protected in any way.

This was the obvious route from the building, and in the weeks that followed, these same two men seized every few minutes' chance they got to cut through rafters and laths, which were left in position as a safeguard against any casual inspection; an unnecessary precaution as we subsequently discovered.

MARRIED IN BELFAST



Mr. Hugh McAteer, former I.R.A. Chief of Staff, and his bride, Miss Nora McKearney, signing the register after their marriage last Tuesday at St. Peter's Pro-Cathedral, Belfast. Mr. McAteer was released last August from Belfast Jail, where he was serving a 15-year sentence. His bride was interned at Armagh for three years during the war. The ceremony, with Nuptial Mass and Papal Blessing, was performed by Rev. P. McAtamney, C.C.

The groom, who is the third son of Mr. and Mrs. Hugh McAteer, 76 William St., Derry, had his brother, Mr. Edward McAteer, M.P. for Mid Derry in the Northern Commons, as best man. Messrs. Liam Burke, Sean McArdle, Gerry O'Reilly, Jack McCaffrey, Harry and John Patrick, and Joseph Doyle were ushers.

The bride, who is the third daughter of Mrs. Elizabeth and the late Mr. John McKearney, Odessa St., Belfast, was given away by her brother, Mr. Joseph McKearney. Her sister-in-law, Mrs. Joseph McKearney, was matron of honour.

Mr. and Mrs. McAteer later left for their honeymoon in Dublin. They will live in Derry, where Mr. McAteer is an accountant.

Sunday Independent, April 8, 1951

BELFAST WEDDING



Mr. Hugh McAteer, former Chief-of-Staff of the I.R.A., and Miss Nora McKearney, who were married in St. Peter's Pro-Cathedral, Belfast.

Evening Herald, 4th April, 1951

GREETINGS For COUPLE



Mr. Hugh McAteer, William Street, Derry, and his bride, formerly Miss Nora McKearney, Odessa St., Belfast, being congratulated by an estimated 2,000 well-wishers after their marriage in St. Peter's Pro-Cathedral, Belfast, yesterday. Inset—bridegroom and bride.

Irish Press, 4th April, 1951

★ *Set-Backs On Eve Of Jail Break* ★

CRIMINAL DISCOVERED THE ESCAPE PLANS

Third Instalment

THIS is the third instalment of Hugh McAteer's own story of his dramatic escape from Belfast Jail on January 15, 1943, and of one of the greatest manhunts ever staged by the police in the Six Counties to apprehend the 26-year-old Republican leader and three others who escaped with him.

These were troubled times in Belfast and McAteer was a "wanted" man. He had eluded capture until he and a colleague were caught when they walked into a police trap set by a school colleague of his who had invited him to his house.

McAteer was sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment. Immediately a jail break was planned with fellow prisoners and arrangements were made for smuggling in hack-saw blades. Then by chance an unlocked trap-door was found.

NOW READ ON

To Go Ahead Or Not Was The Big Decision To Be Made

Sunday Independent, April 15, 1951



Hugh McAteer

AS the hack-saws continued day by day to bite deeper and deeper into the rafters, I went ahead with the manufacture of the rope - ladders. These

**Made
Rope
Ladders**

were of the ordinary conventional escape type, made by tearing sheets lengthwise in halves, sewing the halves end to end, twisting and then binding with waxed cord. A large hook to catch on top of the outer wall was made from a bed-rail, bent in an S-shape. To prevent it from slipping back over the barbed wire which matted the top of the wall, we swathed the hook with bandages, knowing that once the barbs caught in the cloth it would be extremely difficult to remove the hook, even deliberately.

The bandaging had the further effect of deadening any sound of the metal against the wall, which was an important consideration in view of the close proximity of the warders' sleeping quarters.

To place the hook on top of the wall, a long pole was necessary and a number of leather bands, made in the prison shoe shop, were fitted to the end of short sticks, forming a series of joints after the fashion of a fishing rod. The jointing was essential for the difficulty of having a twelve-foot pole is obvious.

* * *

A FEW days after Christmas we experienced our first setback, when one afternoon we discovered that the trap-door had been padlocked. Had the escape been discovered or

Our First Set-back

was the locking merely the instinctive reaction of some warder at the sight of an unfastened lock? For a

day or so, some of our men kept the lavatory under observation, but saw no suspicious signs or unusual alertness among the warders on duty near at hand. There was also a complete absence of that undercurrent of excitement, which marks any unusual occurrence in prison.

We decided to put the matter to the test, and when one of our workers volunteered to try to pick the lock he was told to go ahead. He picked the lock successfully, and then finding the coast apparently clear, entered the roof space to examine the scene of operations.

He found everything in order, and the precious hacksaw blades still in their hiding place.

Obviously the locking of the trapdoor had no special significance, and the work on the roof proceeded, but with the additional difficulty that now the lock had to be picked and re-locked each day.

For the day of the escape we arranged to fill the socket of the lock with soap, which would be enough to hold it in position and thus appear locked to an observer from the floor, and would at the same time save precious minutes that might otherwise be lost on the morning of our departure.

* * *

WHEN everything was nearly ready we were confronted with a situation that almost wrecked the entire plan. One of the ordinary non-political prisoners acci-

*Found
Out by a
Criminal*

dentally discovered the preparations for escape. This was really serious, for we had found by hard experience that few prisoners of that type were trustworthy.

A staff meeting was called immediately, and it was strongly urged on us that it would be madness to proceed any further now.

Knowing how strong most Irishmen are on historical precedents, I recalled Stephen's escape and the criminal who had, at considerable sacrifice,

refused to betray him. But my argument was not taken seriously, though it was finally and reluctantly decided to advise the unfortunate criminal of the positive danger of doing anything that would jeopardise the escape.

Two Belfast volunteers were selected to convey this advice to him. But it was unnecessary. He indignantly denied the imputation that he could possibly be a "stool-pigeon," and swore by all the gods he knew that we had nothing to fear from him.

HE was as good as his word. As we later found, for after the escape, when tempting offers were made to any prisoner who could give any information at all about our

*Date of
Escape
Fixed*

preparations or plans. he refused to tell what he knew. But, recalling the incident now, I must admit that by

normal standards we were unduly reckless in entrusting our lives, for that is what it meant, to any criminal, who had apparently so much to gain by betraying us, and who was not tied to us by any common bond of loyalty.

As the second week in the New Year of 1943 drew to its close we fixed on January 15th as the most suitable day for the "break," for, with the moon setting very early, a dark morning seemed indicated.

The personnel of the escape party had already been decided—Patrick Donnelly, Armagh, who was o/c of the Republican Prisoners; Seamus Steele, one of the best-known Belfast Republicans; Edward Maguire, whose knowledge of slating would be useful in opening the roof, and myself.

* * *

ON the evening of January 14. we took farewell of our comrades and fellow-workers. They gathered in successive small groups in a cell and, as I looked at their

**Said
Good-bye
to Others**

faces, I realised that many of them would gladly have joined us in our venture, but for most of them it was a rather sad affair, for they believed that the odds were dead against us, and felt, too, that they were, perhaps, seeing us for the last time. I shook hands with each of them and, with their fervent prayers for success ringing in my ears, I retired to my own cell on the top tier.

The rest of the evening until "lights-out," I spent in trying to finish Lawrence's "Seven Pillars of Wisdom." It was a poor effort, for I found it impossible to concentrate, and to this day I have no idea of the last hundred pages of the book.

For the nth time I wondered if I had been right in urging my comrades to a course of action that might well end in death.

Again and again, I turned over in my mind the chances of our getting past the armed guard at the wall and then past the police patrol on the Crumlin Road. But the decision was now taken finally, and only some powerful external circumstance could prevent our making the attempt. With that thought I went to bed.

* * *

THE following morning I was up and dressed very early. At 8 o'clock, as breakfast was handed to me, I told the warder on duty that I wished to go to the lavatory.

***Climbed
on to the
Roof***

Leaving my cell-door unlocked, he moved on slowly down the tier handing in tea, milk and bread to each prisoner. He had only gone about half a dozen yards when Pat Donnelly, arrived from the tier below, followed almost immediately by Seamus Steele and Edward Maguire from the ground floor tier.

We pulled socks over our boots to deaden the sound of our feet on the wall of the cell-block, and when the breakfast-serving warder had passed the lavatory we tip-toed down one after another, entered and closed the door gently after us.

Piling one table on top of another, we climbed up through the opening in the ceiling and replaced the trap-door.

Some of our comrades would, as arranged, remove the tables for us. Still others had been detailed to close our cell doors to delay as long as possible the discovery of our absence. We heard afterwards that a number of them had added a touch of realism by holding, within hearing of the warders, a one-sided conversation at the doors of our empty cells.

*Hugh
McAteer's
Sensational Story
Of Jail Break*

THE ESCAPE

Sunday Independent, April 22, 1951

Four Get Out Of Belfast Prison

Fourth Instalment

THIS is the fourth instalment of Hugh McAteer's own story of his dramatic escape from Belfast Jail on January 15, 1943, and of one of the greatest manhunts ever staged by the police in the Six Counties to apprehend the 26-year-old Republican leader and three others who escaped with him.

These were troubled times in Belfast and McAteer was a "wanted" man. He had eluded capture until he and a colleague were caught when they walked into a police trap set by a school colleague of his who had invited him to his house.

McAteer was sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment. Immediately a jail break was planned with fellow prisoners and arrangements were made to get on to the prison roof through an unlocked trap door.

WE paused for a moment in the pitch darkness of the roof-space, and then, lighting a candle, moved to the place where we intended to smash through the roof. But the removal of the slates was not as easy as we had expected, and in order to save time we applied brute force.

The first slate parted from the nails with a crack like a pistol-shot, and we waited a breathless moment for the shrilling whistles that would betoken the failure of our escape.

* * *

BUT the silence continued unbroken, and carefully removing a few more slates, we loaded ourselves with ropes, rope-ladder, hook, etc. Then having already secured one end of the 30-foot rope to a beam, we slipped the other end over the eaves, and the first man, Edward Maguire, descended, followed by the others.

Abnormal Horror of Heights

I went last, because at one time I used to suffer from an abnormal horror of heights, and I feared that I might lose my nerve and just cling to the rope, thereby effectively stopping anyone who might follow me.

But in the excitement of the moment I had no time for phobias, and I climbed through the hole in the roof without difficulty.

Below me I could see my comrades crossing the prison yard towards the outer wall, and, further to my left, I could dimly discern the outline of the armed warder who stood on guard at the inside of the front gate.

★ ★ ★

GRIPPING the rope, I swung myself over the eaves and slipped down the thirty feet to the ground. Joining my comrades at the wall, I was in time to see them fitting the jointed rod into the socket of the hook. When we attempted to place the hook on top of the wall we discovered our first miscalculation. The rod was more than seven feet too short.

All Crashed to the Ground

Climbing on to my back, Ed. Maguire tried to place the hook in position, but the toe of his boots, digging into my back, caused me to squirm and, losing his balance, he, hook, ropes and all crashed to the ground on top of me. As he picked himself up he glared at me and asked indignantly:

"Why the hell did you have to start wriggling just then?"

"God Almighty," I snapped, "Do you think I did it for a joke?"

"I think, lads," said Donnelly pacifically, "That you should finish that discussion on the other side of the wall."



AS I held the rope-ladder out from the wall, Maguire swarmed up and placed a blanket, folded in four, over the barbed wire to protect our hands. Then, slipping over the wall, he disappeared from view. The others followed, and when they also had disappeared from view I started up the ladder.

But the climb was more difficult than I had imagined, and my arms were tired from holding the ladder for the others. As I neared the top of the wall an overpowering weariness deadened my arms, and, unable to hold on another moment, I let go and dropped the eighteen feet or so back into the prison grounds.

Grasped the Naked Barbed Wire

I lay for a moment with the breath knocked out of me. When I got to my feet I felt a twinge of pain in my left ankle. But it was forgotten as I raced up the ladder a second time, desperation lending strength to my limbs.

As I prepared to swing over the top of the wall I noticed for the first time that the folded blanket was placed to the right of the hook, which meant that in order to pass over the blanket I would have to lever myself with my left hand. But my left arm is considerably weaker than my right and, ignoring the blanket-pad, I grasped the naked barbed wire, and, as the barbs bit into my hand, I swung myself on to the wall.

I WAITED for a second or two to regain my breath, then reached with my left hand for the down-rope on the outside of the wall. I had momentarily forgotten that the barbs were buried in the palm of my other hand, but the movement to the rope brought a sharp reminder, and instinctively recoiling, I released my grip and fell again to the ground, but this time on the outside of the wall at the back of the warders' cottages.

Each Man For Himself

I struggled to my feet, and in raising myself from the ground noticed that I had left a bloody print where my torn hand had rested. My knee now ached, but I was scarcely aware of it. I looked round for my comrades, even though I knew that they would not be there, for we had decided that once the wall was crossed, it was a case of each man for himself, in the sense that in the event of any hitch there must be no heroics, no sacrificing one's chances to help another.

I felt a fleeting satisfaction in the knowledge that discipline had triumphed over the ordinary human instinct of comradeship.

★ ★ ★

THRUSTING my bleeding hands into my trouser pockets, I limped down the entry behind the warders' cottages and out on to the Crumlin Road, through the front gate that gives access to the cottages and the jail proper. A quick look round showed that there were neither police nor armed guards in the vicinity, and I pressed on down the Crumlin Road as fast as my injured leg permitted:

Still Wore Convict Garb

Crowded trams rumbled past, with their war-time blue lights dimly burning. Workers of all kinds hurried by with the intent look on their faces that is so common to Belfast folk.

But no one noticed my strange clothes, for I was, of course, still dressed in convict garb.

Perhaps the war-time scarcity of clothes had accustomed people to all sorts of unconventional garments. Whatever the reason, very few people gave me a second look, and precious few bothered to give even a first.

★ ★ ★

IN the deceptive dusk of the morning, I lost my way in attempting to take a short-cut. I had very little knowledge of the street geography of the Crumlin Road area and, having no idea how long I might wander about before finding a recognisable landmark, I decided to retrace my steps.

As I painfully reached Carlisle Circus, a number of warders on bicycles raced past, the first of the search parties. Our escape had been discovered and the hunt was on, a hunt that was to last for months and was almost unparalleled in its intensity.

Assisted Up Stairs to Bed

Fifteen minutes later, having seen another warder on his way to the jail, I limped to the door of our billet house. It was well for me that I had no further to go, for I doubt if I could have taken another step unaided. As it was, my comrades had to half carry me up the stairs to bed.

As they prepared to examine my injured leg, Pat Donnelly pointed to my feet. I was still wearing the prison socks pulled over my boots!

We all stared for a moment in surprised silence and then for the first time that morning we laughed. With that laugh, the tension lifted and I felt, with a tremendous surge of exultation, that I was free again, really free, after less than two months.

"WHAT happened you?" they asked after I had been settled in bed.

I explained.

"You were very lucky to have made it," said Donnelly to me.

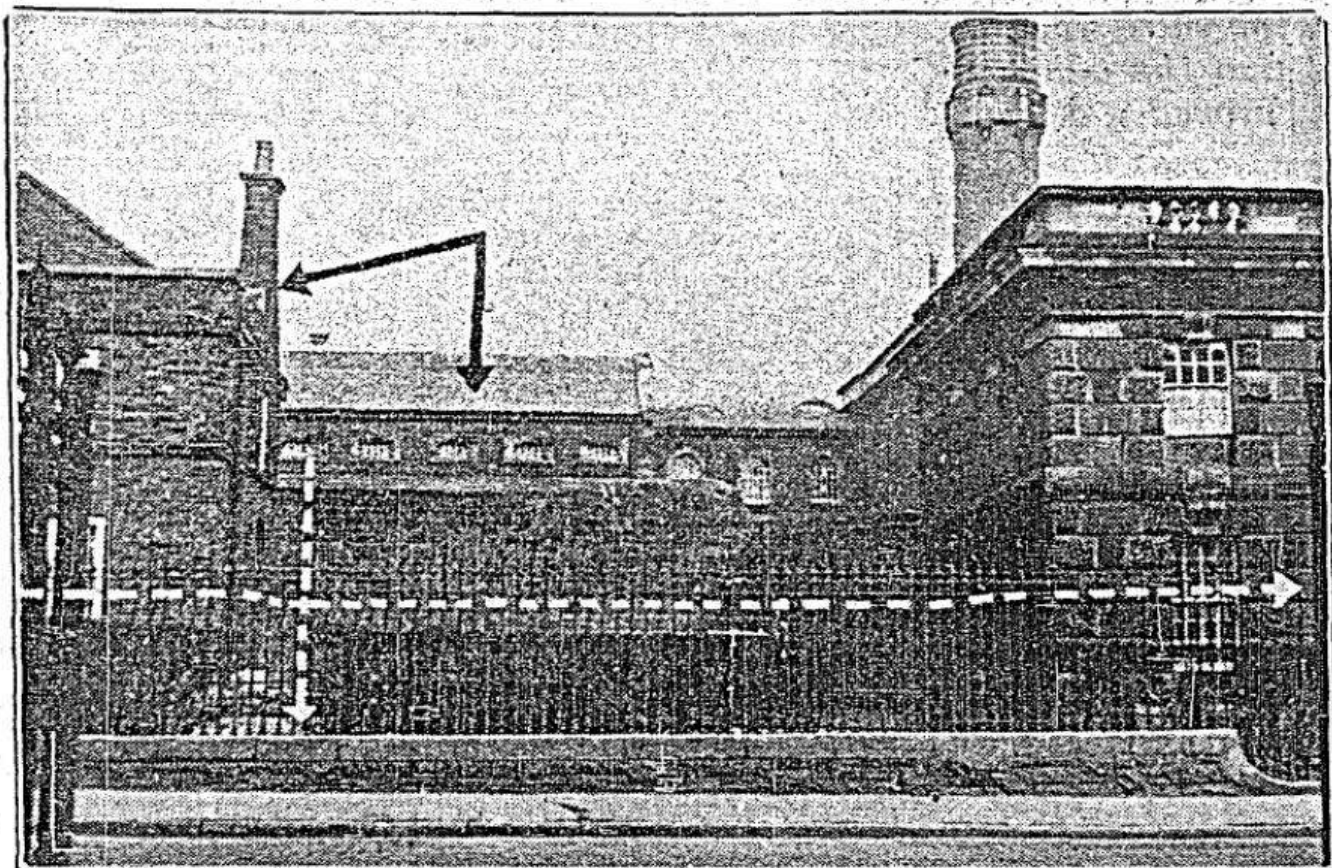
"You'll never know just how lucky I was," was all I could say.

"I wonder what old Judge Andrews will say when he hears this," Donnelly remarked.

Judge's Comment Recalled

And we all laughed again, for every one of us remembered quite clearly that only three days before, in addressing the Grand Jury at the opening of the Belfast City Commission, the Lord Chief Justice Andrews had referred with satisfaction to the fact that the "ring-leaders" were incarcerated.

Certainly, one man, at least, would receive the news of that morning's work with little enthusiasm.



This picture of Belfast Jail indicates how the daring escape was effected. The roof at which the black arrow points vertically is the one from which the escapees smashed the slates, but at a point hidden behind the building on left (as indicated by the second black arrow). The white arrow pointing downwards is along the 18-foot outer wall which the men had to scale (also at a point hidden by the building on left). The horizontal white arrow indicates the path to freedom. Hugging this wall—the entry behind the warder's cottages—they crept around to the front gate on the Crumlin Road.

*Fifth Instalment
This Week*

**Hugh McAteer
and Colleagues
“ON THE RUN”**

*Many Narrow
Escapes*

Sunday Independent, April 29, 1951

THIS is the fifth instalment of Hugh McAteer's own story of his dramatic escape from Belfast Jail on January 15, 1943, and of one of the greatest manhunts ever staged by the police in the Six Counties to apprehend the 26-year-old Republican leader and three others who escaped with him:

Last week, he described the sensational jail break, how they got on to the roof through an unlocked trap door, reached the ground by means of a rope ladder and then scaled the prison wall.

**£3,000 REWARD
FOR
THEIR CAPTURE**

SOON there were signs that news of our escape was spreading—and spreading fast. From our window, my comrades watched police as they hurried past on their way to join the man-hunt. Little groups of people gathered in excited discussion and as police drew near they fell silent.

But I saw nothing of this myself, for I could not leave the bed. My leg was now swollen and blackened from foot to thigh, and so painful that I could not even move unaided. My comrades took turns at massaging it in an effort to relieve the pain.

I slept very little that night, for every movement in bed sent a throb of pain through me.

All through the wakeful hours I found myself wondering how my comrades in jail were faring and trying not to think of the anxiety that our relatives must be suffering. For them, also, I knew it would be a sleepless night, waiting for the "nuisance" raid that would surely be fruitless, for not even the most simple-minded R.U.C. man expected to find us sleeping in our homes.

Took Away Our Prison Outfits

ON Saturday, a girl brought us civilian clothing, and took away our prison outfits. All except myself, were now ready to leave the house any time, for we agreed that it would be unwise for all four of us to remain together.

A chance police raid on our house would have meant the re-capture of the whole party, and we meant to avoid turning our venture into such a fiasco by separating without delay.

Accordingly, that week-end Donnelly, Steele and Maguire were removed without incident to houses in different parts of the city.

I REMAINED where I was, merely because I was unable to move. Several of my comrades arrived to discuss ways of transferring me.

They told me it was out of the question, for the present, to use any sort of transport, for everything on wheels was being stopped and searched. They had seen a bread van held up and even the drawer at the back searched, in the hope, as someone remarked, of finding us "loafing" in a baker's cart.

Even a lorry load of stones had been emptied on the street by police. Detectives appeared to be travelling on every bus and tram in Nationalist areas, whilst warders acted as "spotters" in police cars patrolling the Falls Road.

Thousands Engaged in Search

THE authorities seemed to be displaying an undue anxiety for our return. Police, "Specials," and Home Guards were on the alert throughout the North, and in particular near Belfast, where several thousand were engaged in fine-combing the historic hills above the city.

Docks, railways and bus depots were being constantly watched.

And, not content with their own efforts, they sought to enlist the co-operation of civilians by putting £3,000 reward notices on the police barracks of the Six-Counties. But no one ever claimed the wages of the informer.

Many Rumours Were Going Around

THE complete lack of news of our whereabouts gave rise to an entertaining variety of stories. Newspapers suggested that we had left the country in various ways and popular report supplied the imaginary details of missing military lorries, and even aeroplanes, and of submarines off the Irish coast.

Many were convinced that we had left for America in a troopship. The plain truth, of course, was that we stayed in Belfast, and for transport relied largely on the Belfast Corporation.

I later met many people, including some of the police after my recapture, who assured me confidentially that they had seen me in a variety of disguises I had never used, and in places where I had never set foot. Any attempt to deny these reports was dismissed with a knowing smile as being due to an excess of caution.

Transferred to Another House

ABOUT a week after the escape I was supplied with a heavy walking-stick, and, while armed men patrolled the area, I was helped limping out of the house, through a side-street and out on to a main thoroughfare, where a car waited.

During the journey that followed, my two guards sat with revolvers in their hands, but our passage through the gathering dusk was not challenged, and we arrived safely at a house in the Falls district where I had a tremendous welcome from the people there.

Here, for the first time, a doctor was brought in to examine my leg, despite my protestations that it was unnecessary. My comrades thought otherwise. The doctor diagnosed severe sprains in the ankle and knee, but nothing really serious, and recommended plenty of rest. But I could not rest and insisted on getting about, even though for six weeks I had to depend on my stick.

Wore Glasses As a Disguise

TOWARDS the end of January, an important meeting was held in Belfast and I attended it, for it had to deal with, among other things, the forthcoming escape from Derry Jail.

In an effort at some slight disguise, I wore glasses and, as I climbed painfully on to a bus, I saw the conductor watching me with a slightly cynical smile. As he handed me my ticket, he leaned over and whispered: "Very good acting, but a damned bad disguise." I smiled a little ruefully at him, and with a friendly nod he went on about his work.

Busman Saves Me From Capture

I HAD good cause to be grateful that he had penetrated my "disguise" for, when travelling by the same bus some weeks later, he save me from almost certain capture.

As I was getting ready to alight, he moved suddenly and signalled the driver not to stop, and the bus raced on. I looked at him in surprise, for he knew my stopping place well.

He pointed through the back window — a group of police and detectives were standing at the stop. Evidently they were waiting to board the bus for a routine search, but when it did not stop they simply waited for the next bus.

Challenged by the Police

TO complete my disguise, I agreed to a suggestion that I should have my normally fair hair dyed black. This was duly done, and when I returned to my stopping house that evening the people there burst out laughing when they saw me.

"What's the joke?" I asked coldly.

"You look very funny with black hair."

"Not funny, but unique." I corrected.

"Unique?"

"Yes," I said solemnly, "I'm one of the few men who have dyed for Ireland and lived to tell the tale."

As soon as I could move without the aid of a stick I naturally resumed the normal activities of a man "on the run." In my journeys about the town I was held up and challenged for my identity card on a number of occasions. I was rather lucky in these encounters, and my repeated success in bluffing the police developed a carelessness that might have cost me my liberty.

Police With Drawn Revolvers

PASSING St. Peter's Church one evening, I was held up by two policemen who stepped from a doorway with drawn revolvers. I was carrying a Shankill Road identity card, and when they had examined it, one of them asked:

"What are you doing here? This is no place for a man from the Shankill."

"Taking a short cut to the G.N.R. station," I said, and trotted out my prepared story about going to visit relatives who were evacuated to the country.

My story was so convincing that they accepted it without further question, holstered their revolvers and handed me back my identity card. I took it and as I turned away I muttered: "Go raibh maith agat." The moment I had spoken I realised my blunder, but, luckily for me, neither of my interrogators appeared to know what I had said, for they retreated into the shadows again, waiting to stop the next suspect.

*Hugh McAteer And Colleagues,
After Escaping
From Belfast Prison.*

Plan

A

TUNNEL UNDER

DERRY JAIL

Sunday Independent, May 6, 1951.



A view of the front of Derry Jail.

THIS is the sixth instalment of Hugh McAteer's own story of his dramatic escape from Belfast Jail on January 15, 1943, and of one of the greatest manhunts ever staged by the police in the Six Counties, to apprehend the 26-year-old Republican leader and three others who escaped with him.

Last week he described the many narrow escapes they had in trying to avoid re-arrest.

THE necessity for having identity cards was a constant source of trouble, but not of difficulty to us.

In the early days of 1942 we had no great bother in producing our own. We simply printed copies of the inside portion of the official identity card, and having filled in a false name and National Registration number, we put the card into one of the transparent holders that were then popular.

We assumed—and as events proved very nearly 100 per cent rightly so—it most unlikely that a policeman would be so meticulous about identity cards that he would take it out of the holder to examine the outside for the Government crest, which our printer had found impossible to reproduce satisfactorily.

Instructions to "Specials"

UNTIL about July, 1942, our cards continued to be serviceable, but their usefulness suddenly disappeared when an unusually sceptical policeman insisted on examining the whole card inside and outside and discovered it was blank at the back.

In a day or two instructions were issued to all members of the R.U.C. and "Specials" to look particularly for the crest, but our intelligence system was still functioning usefully, and we were notified of the new instructions in good time.

To Intelligence was assigned the task of dealing with this new difficulty: but the problem was actually solved by one of my own men, who found that, with care, it was possible to split an official identity card. By pasting the split-off crest-printed back to one of our own printed cards he produced a card that almost defied detection.

Use of Ink-Erasing Liquid

A **NOTHER** method was discovered independently. Ink-erasing liquid certainly removed writing from official identity cards, but left a slight but noticeable discoloration. To overcome this difficulty the whole card was immersed in the liquid, thus making the alteration in colour uniform all over the card.

In the summer of 1943, the British Authorities made a determined effort to close the loopholes in the identity card system.

New cards were issued, which were extremely difficult to reproduce with the means at our disposal, and which reacted with marked discoloration to the use of erasing liquid. We were thus compelled to use the official identity card of someone not "on the run," who could have a new one issued on payment of one shilling.

Hundreds of Cards Lost Each Day

AS a precaution against such a move on our part, the Authorities arranged that as soon as a card was reported missing its particulars were issued to all police in the district, who were thus enabled to check the details of the missing cards list against those of the cards produced on demand by the people in the locality.

The system might have worked well from the police point of view had the loss of cards continued at a normal rate, but it broke down completely when identity cards were systematically reported "lost" at the rate of hundreds per day.

The typewritten lists of "lost" cards grew to such dimensions that it was impossible to continue to operate the scheme, and it was finally abandoned in a few weeks.

Found to be a Child's Identity Card

S EAMUS BURNS, afterwards killed in Belfast, was involved in an amusing incident concerning his identity card. After his escape from Derry Jail he returned to Belfast equipped with a card he had procured for himself. In one of the periodic police swoops on buses he was asked for his card and he confidently handed it to a policeman, who looked at it carefully for a moment and asked: "Is this your card? Where did you get it?"

"Of course it's mine," Burns answered, now very much on the alert. "I got it at the Food Office after I lost my original card."

"Well, somebody has made a mistake. This is a child's card," the policeman pointed out.

Seamus Burns realised that his new-found freedom was in danger, and casually slipping his hand into his pocket gripped his revolver. To gain time he asked innocently:

"What should I do about it?"

The policeman immediately became the self-important dispenser of official information.

"Just take it, along with your ration book, to the Food Office, and they will give you a proper card. If you have any bother with them call round to the barracks and I'll fix it up for you."

"Thank you, constable," said Burns gratefully, and alighting from the bus he hurried to get himself another card, but not at the Belfast Food Office.

Planning Derry Jail Escape

DURING February and March, we were chiefly occupied in organising assistance for the Derry Jail escape (in which 21 internees escaped), work on which had been proceeding for months.

Via the ubiquitous "lines of communication," we were kept informed of progress, but it was only after the escape was over that we learned the complete story in all its fascinating detail.

It was a story of courage and perseverance, of danger and anxiety long drawn out, for it had started some five months before the actual escape.

In the autumn of 1942, a

fresh batch of Republican internees had been transferred from Belfast to Derry Jail, and some of the more enterprising immediately looked round for possible ways of escape. The wooden floors in the lower tier cells naturally suggested a tunnel, and, having carefully loosened some of the boards in a cell, the three occupants of the selected cell, Liam Graham, Eddie Steele and James O'Hagan, set to work.

Kept Watch For Warders

DERRY JAIL is built on a hill, and the would-be escapees realised that the tunnel would have to go very deep. But only actual experience revealed that the vertical entrance shaft would have to go to a depth of twenty-two feet before the tunnel could be driven horizontally under the foundations of the wall of the cell-block.

The excavation was done at night, and, while two of the men worked, the third kept watch for the night patrols, who came round the corridors at frequent intervals, flashed their lights on the beds, and satisfied themselves that no prisoner was missing.

As soon as the internee on the look-out duty heard the night patrols approaching, he

signalled to the two workers below, who immediately shinned up the twenty-foot rope and jumped, fully clothed, into bed, and were quietly resting when the check-up took place.

Disposing of Clay and Boulders

THE clay dug out each night was packed into about a dozen bags made from pillow cases. They were then stored in the air space beneath the cell floor-boards until the following morning. As opportunity presented itself during the day, the bags were lifted by willing helpers, who dashed into nearby lavatories and emptied the clay.

The disposal of the clay was thus a simple enough matter, but many people even yet are still puzzled as to what happened the large boulders that must inevitably have been encountered in the digging.

Here again the solution was simple. Some of them were hidden under the timbered floors of adjacent cells; the rest were simply buried in the tunnel and the displaced clay got rid of via the lavatories.

Discovery Seemed Certain

BUT the sewerage system of Derry Jail was never designed to cope with tons of clay, and the inevitable happened.

The sewers became blocked, and the tunnellers looked out of their window one morning to find jailers, engineers and trades-warders grouped round manholes, from which had been removed quantities of the familiar heavy red clay dug from the tunnel.

Discovery seemed certain, but the engineers simply cleared the sewers and replaced the manhole covers.

A few months later the sewers became choked a second time, and the same thing happened again. No jailer appeared to suspect anything amiss. Whatever explanation the officials of the prison accepted among themselves, it involved no interference with the internees or the good work on hand. Warders are a trusting crew.

Almost Five Months to Complete

THE work was painfully arduous and heartbreakingly slow, and it took almost five months to complete the tunnel which, vertically and horizontally, was about forty yards long.

The tunnel itself was so small in cross-section that it could only be crawled through.

and the digger had to lie flat, which, of course, hampered his movements considerably and cost a lot of time in moving to and from the "face."

*Five Month's Digging
Led To Freedom*

21 ESCAPE FROM DERRY JAIL

Sunday Independent, May 13, 1951.

DASH ACROSS BORDER IN FURNITURE VAN

THIS is the seventh instalment of Hugh McAteer's own story of how, after escaping from Belfast Jail on January 15, 1943, with three other Republicans, they next helped in the dramatic Derry Jail break.

THE tunnel had reached about half way towards completion when one day, as Liam Graham was digging, there was a heavy rumbling noise, and part of the roof collapsed behind him, burying him alive.

Fortunately, it was a small fall, and his fellow-worker, digging desperately, cleared a small air-hole through the rubble, thus eliminating the danger of Graham's suffocating.

He could do nothing to help himself, for the roof-fall had occurred behind him and the tunnel was too small to permit him to turn round.

Found the Tunnel Flooded

● It was a most unnerving experience and showed the danger in which they worked, but the following night both were back again.

The cell from which the tunnel was started was that occupied by Liam Graham, Eddie Steele and John McGreevey, the last-mentioned name being incorrectly given in last week's instalment.

There were other natural dangers to be contended with, as they discovered a short time later. When entering the tunnel one night they discovered that it was flooded. They had accidentally tapped an underground spring.

Hours of tedious baling were needed and when at last they located the source of the flooding they plastered almost a foot of the heavy clay over it, which stopped the flow of water, but meant still more work in raising the roof level another foot.


Struck Coffin in the Digging

● But having gone so far they were not going to be stopped by bad ventilation, roof-falls or floods, and with dogged persistence they penetrated further and further. When once the tunneller struck wood, it was accepted as just one more obstacle. Further digging revealed metal, and, with his curiosity now aroused the "face" worker continued to strip away the clay when

with a sudden shock he realised that he had struck a coffin.

It bore a large silver cross, indicating clearly enough that it was not the bones of some long forgotten murderer that the coffin contained. But whose was the sleep thus rudely shattered they never knew, nor could they even guess.

Grave Danger of Suffocation

 The two levels in the tunnel and the increasing distance from the opening created a new danger, that of suffocation. The candle refused to burn for any length of time for lack of oxygen, and the "face" worker was in constant danger of being overcome. To avoid the fatal consequences of this, one man was kept posted in the tunnel close to the opening, so that in the event of the digger getting into difficulty, help was always readily available.

- If the work was arduous before it was now doubly so, and progress was slow. But they kept at it doggedly, and faithfully took their turns at the digging. During one of Liam Graham's spells of working he drove the crowbar into the "face" of the tunnel, and something struck him with such force that he almost fainted. As he lay gasping for a moment he suddenly noticed a faint whistling noise. It was fresh air, good, clean, wholesome air, and he realised with a thrill that they had broken through the ground surface.

Came up in a Coalhouse

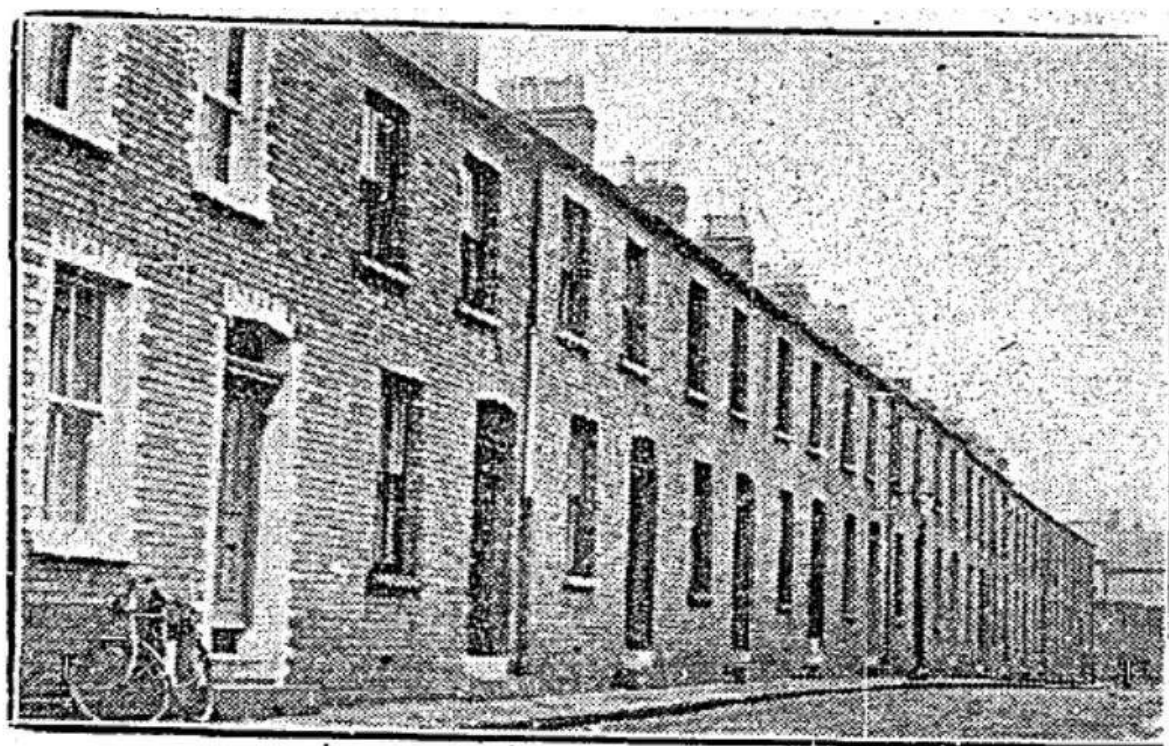
● As he withdrew the crowbar a few bits of rubble fell, and by the guttering light of the candle he saw that it was coal, and coal that was perfectly dry, in marked contrast to the all-pervading dampness of the tunnel. He concluded that he had cut through into someone's coalhouse — Logue's of Harding Street, as it afterwards proved. To guard against accidental discovery, he filled a couple of bags with clay and then, jamming them into position with timber supports, he returned to report to his comrades.

Five months of exhausting and hazardous work was ended.

The tunnel was finished and through the accurate information supplied we were in a position to know where the break through was likely to be. It only remained for us to fix, in consultation with the internee leaders, the date of the escape, which we did for March 21, and to provide the getaway from the prison.

It would, we knew, have been difficult to provide safe

refuges for a large body of men in a town the size of Derry. Clearly the escapees would not travel very far in the Six-Counties once the alarm was raised. To cross the Border into the Twenty-Six Counties, where we felt there would be a good deal of sympathy with the prisoners, seemed a good idea, and it was made all the more attractive by the close proximity of the Border to Derry. This plan was finally adopted.



Harding Street, Derry—through a coal-house at the back of one of these houses the prisoners emerged from the tunnel.

Furniture Van Used

● The transport of the men from the jail presented a serious problem until someone suggested a furniture van. The suggestion was excellent, for such a van could park in a side street without arousing suspicion, it could easily accommodate the score of men we expected, and could carry its load through the main streets without attracting attention.

Accordingly, a large furniture van was hired in Belfast in the ordinary way and sent to Derry on Friday, March 19. On the same day the Belfast section of the rescue party, who, with the exception of the three men in charge, were completely ignorant of their mission, left in twos and threes, by various routes for Derry.

Dash Across the Border

● The escape was timed for 9 a.m. on Saturday and all that morning I waited expectantly for news. About ten o'clock Belfast was humming with rumours of a large escape from Derry Jail. It was not until nearly midday, however, that the first definite report reached me.

The operation had been a success. 21 had got away.

Later in the day the men in command of the rescue party returned and gave a detailed report of what had happened, the cordoning off by armed volunteers of the area at the back of the jail, the detention by our men of the van-driver, the appearance of the escapees at the door of the house, and the dramatic dash across the Border. The whole operation had been carried through dead on time, with one hitch only: six of the prisoners had been left behind in the furniture van, but those six proved quite capable of looking after themselves and, after an exciting series of personal adventures, reached Dublin and Belfast.

Round-up of the Escapees

● We were warmly congratulating our selves on the success of the escape when the news came like a bombshell of the round-up of the escapees by the armed forces of the 26-Counties Government, and their identification by warders from Derry Jail, who had crossed the Border for that purpose. Some of the prisoners avoided capture and eventually made their way back to Belfast. But most of them had escaped from a Northern Jail only to find themselves in a Southern internment camp. It was a saddening end to a gallant adventure.

“WANTED” MEN’S DEMONSTRATION IN CINEMA

THIS is the eighth instalment of Hugh McAteer’s own story of how, after escaping from Belfast Jail on January 15, 1943, with three other Republicans, they next helped in the dramatic Derry Jail break and succeeded in eluding the police in one of the greatest manhunts ever staged in the Six Counties.

Sunday Independent, May 20, 1951

BY the middle of April, 1943, we acknowledged to each other what we had long felt in our own hearts—that the possibility of our plans in the North succeeding was out of the question for the present.

The propaganda value of the Derry escape, as evidenced by the many popular ballads, was tremendous; the practical result very small. The mass of the people were thoroughly disillusioned by the attitude of the 26-County Government towards us in the North; hundreds of our more experienced men were imprisoned or interned.

The pattern of our work was thus clear. We had first of all to preserve the spirit of the movement, even if we could achieve nothing more concrete, and, secondly, to keep ourselves out of the jails as long as possible, and even this was becoming more and more difficult.

The frequent use of our old stopping-houses, the difficulty of obtaining new ones and the necessarily circumscribed area of our activities made the work of the police easier, and they struck with increasing accuracy.



Narrow Escape in Raid

But my luck still held, as I had good reason to observe when on one occasion, just ten minutes after my arrival in my stopping-house, the landlady gasped, "The police." A quick glance through the glass hall-door revealed the R.U.C. men pouring out of their squad cars. Moving with more than my usual speed, I reached the yard gate as they burst in by the front door.

In their hurry to get into the house, the raiders at the front had neglected to allow time for the posting of a second squad at the rear, and I stepped out into a mews-lane (known locally as an "entry"). It was still clear of police. I turned to my left and, by a great effort of will, strolled casually down the mews as the police, with stenguns in hand, dashed round the other end, and determinedly grouped themselves round the door I had just left. They took no notice of me. Their instructions, apparently,

were to stop anyone leaving by the back. But nothing, it seems, had been said of anyone who had already left!

With guns at the ready they waited watchfully, but in vain, for the flight of the bird that had already flown.



Broadway Cinema, Falls Road, Belfast

Planned Easter Week Commemoration

EASTER was now at hand, and it was necessary to arrange for Easter Week Commemoration in Belfast. We knew it would be a tricky job; for to the usual vigilance of the police would be added a nervous alertness, as a result of what happened at the previous Easter.

Acting on a suggestion made to one of our leaders, we decided to hold the Commemoration in a Falls Road cinema on Holy Saturday.

Accordingly, about a score of volunteers were mobilised for that evening, and met in a house convenient to the Broadway Cinema. All were given revolvers, and some who were to do duty on the flat roof of the cinema were, in addition, handed grenades, which, we believed, would be effective in stopping any police rush should the alarm be raised.

Surprise For Cinema Audience

WE walked towards the cinema in pairs, each two keeping the preceding pair in view, so that should any be intercepted by police a whole chain of assistance would be immediately available. But though police squad cars and armoured cars cruised past us, we reached the Broadway without incident, and, entering quietly, took our places among the audience.

At five minutes past five Seamus Steele and I rose from our seats and walked towards the stage. A quick glance round satisfied us that our men were already at their posts at the exits and entrances. Then a slide was flashed on the screen announcing:

"This cinema has been commandeered by the Irish Republican Army for the purpose of holding an Easter Commemoration in memory of the dead who died for Ireland.

"The Proclamation of the

Republic will be read by Commandant-General Steele, and the statement from the Army Council, Irish Republican Army, will be read by Lieutenant-General McAteer."



Applause Followed Speeches

IN the breathless hush that followed this announcement, we mounted the stage and I introduced Seamus Steele. Through the stillness of the darkened cinema his voice rang clearly as he spoke the immortal words of the Proclamation.

When he had finished there was a great burst of applause from the audience.

My reading of another statement was also greeted with applause. I then called for two minutes' silence in tribute to Ireland's dead, and as I stood to attention there I could not help wondering whether our luck would hold for another ten minutes. I dreaded to think of the

slaughter there would be if the police attempted to interfere with our Commemoration. A gun battle in a crowded cinema could not be without casualties among the unwilling spectators.

Suddenly a voice rang out, "Volunteers! Dismiss!" The ceremony was over and without a hitch.

Steele and I dropped down from the platform and left through a nearby exit with the enthusiastic applause still ringing in our ears.

Helped to Dig Tunnel

It should be made clear that James O'Hagan, whose name has been mentioned in the story of the Derry Jail escape, though not actually in the cell from which the tunnel was made, was prominent amongst those who laboured so patiently in the digging of the tunnel that eventually led to the escape. Mr. O'Hagan is now living in Dublin.

Hugh McAteer Tells Of His Recapture

THIS is the ninth and concluding instalment of Hugh McAteer's own story of his escape from Belfast Jail on January 15, 1943, with three other Republicans, and how 21 men took part in the dramatic Derry Jail break. In last week's instalment he described how "wanted men" staged an Easter Week Commemoration in a Belfast cinema.

POLICE RAIDS AND CORDONS

Sunday Independent, May 27, 1951

ON the Falls Road we separated and I made for my stopping-house. Within half-an-hour a message was received saying that all our men had got away safely. A statement announcing the ceremony was immediately sent to the newspapers.

The senior police officials, we afterwards learned, were enraged at our having again stolen a march on them and tried hard to spread the rumour that neither Steele nor I had been near the cinema, and that two others had doubled for us. But few were willing to believe that.

Almost One Hundred Men Detained

OVER that week-end in Belfast alone almost one hundred men, including one of our leaders, were detained. His was a heavy loss, in no way lightened by the re-capture a month later of Seamus Steele, the first of my escape team to be captured in the North.

The months that followed were difficult in the extreme.

The number of our active full-time men was small and was constantly being reduced by captures. But against the dark background of those days a few incidents stand out clearly, particularly one which illustrates a curious side of the Belfast Unionist character.

Warned by Unionist Woman

FOR some months I had been stopping in a "mixed" district. One evening the woman of the house returned after a brief hall-door chat, and she looked mystified.

"Do you know who that was?" she asked.

"No."

"That was one of the Orange women up the street."

"What did she want?" I asked, for I knew that social calls between Orange and Green were not so common.

"She came to warn me that police are raiding in the district."

"Why should she think you need warning?" I asked.

"That's what is puzzling me," she answered.

Four or five weeks later she brought word of another raid, and on both occasions her timely warning enabled me to make a leisurely escape. Why, I wondered, had she taken such action, and action so much at variance with her upbringing and environment. Had some distant race memory stirred in her heart again, reawakening something of the spirit that had, perhaps, sent an ancestor of hers storming, pike in hand, into Antrim town on a summer's day in '98?

District Cordoned by Police

OF all the incidents of that period one remains clearest in my memory, because of the splendid courage of one of my comrades, Liam, and the near tragic consequences of his deed.

In a house in one of the side streets, off the Falls Road, I had met a number of Belfast leaders, and when late at night they left, I remained to clear away my papers.

An unexpected message arrived to say that the whole district was cordoned off by squads of raiding police.

Obviously, I could not leave, so making the best of it, I prepared to settle down for the night. About 11.30 I heard sounds at the rear of the house, and, slipping open the backdoor, I saw a figure climbing over the shed roof. He wore a soft hat and a large raincoat, and in his hand he carried a revolver.

Climbed Over Walls

I DREW my own gun, but the movement must have caught his eye, for he called softly, "Is that you, Hugh?" and with a shock of relief I recognised Liam's voice.

He dropped into the yard beside me, and when we were safely inside the house I demanded an explanation. He told me that he had been at my "house" when word arrived that I was trapped in the cordoned-off area.

Taking a girl with him, he immediately set out to reach me. And by using the girl as a sort of decoy for the police, he managed to penetrate the cordons at a point two streets behind me. He entered a house, crossed the backyard wall through another house out on to the street immediately to the rear of my conference house. A quick dash across the street, through houses and over walls again, and he was in my house.

The Rumble of Lorries

"But what took you down here, anyway?" I asked.

He looked slightly embarrassed as he answered: "One man could never fight his way out of here by himself. But with two men there is a fair chance of one getting through."

I felt like taking his hand and telling him how proud I was of his courage, but I merely said, "You're a fool taking a chance like that. Come on up to bed."

For hours we heard the heavy tramp of boots on cobble-stones, the rumble of lorries, the peremptory knocks, and the indignant protests of the residents, who complained loudly about their being awakened at that hour of night when, in fact, it was very doubtful if any of them bothered to go to bed that night at all.

Towards morning we abandoned our vigil, went to bed and fell asleep. When we awoke in the morning, the district was quiet again, the raiding was over and the cordons had gone.

Captured by Two Detectives

A FEW weeks later, Liam was captured, and I felt keenly the loss of such a gallant and devoted friend. When I heard the news, the words of Ethna Carberry sprang into my mind:—

"They are going, they are going, and we cannot bid them stay."

In the early afternoon of Saturday, November 21, 1943, I walked out of St. Paul's Church in Belfast and ran right into two detectives. They drew their guns and, signalling to two other R.U.C. men nearby, followed me to an adjacent street, and posted themselves at either end. Reinforcements were rushed from the Springfield Road Barracks, which is only some twenty yards away and an intensive house-to-house search took place.

For me it was the end, but of a chapter only, not of the story. For the story of freedom must go on.

[This marks the end of the *Sunday Independent* articles]

“HUGH McATEER ON HUNGER STRIKE”

Hugh McAteer, who was recaptured in Belfast three weeks ago, is reported to have gone on hunger strike in Belfast Jail, says the Press Association.

It is stated that after his arrest he applied to be treated as a political prisoner, and when this was rejected he refused to take food. His condition is said to be weak.

EVENING HERALD, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1943

[This story was not true]

BELFAST PRISON HUNGER STRIKE

Eight prisoners in Belfast Jail, including Hugh McAteer, of Derry, who was recently recaptured in Belfast after having escaped from prison, have been on hunger strike as a protest against the refusal of the authorities to recognise them as political prisoners. The men are taking water.

The Ministry of Home Affairs declined to comment; but, says the Press Association, it is understood that the strike will be allowed to take its course.

BELFAST HUNGER STRIKE OVER

The hunger strike at Belfast Prison ended last night, when the eight prisoners abandoned their fast, on receiving an assurance that prison conditions would be investigated by the Board of Visitors.

Mr. Eamon Donnelly, M.P., and a brother of Mr. Hugh McAteer, had met officials of the Stormont Ministry of Home Affairs in the morning, following which Mr. McAteer had an interview with the prisoners.

Four of the prisoners (Messrs. Hugh McAteer, Jas. Steele, Pk. McCotter and Liam Burke) are in a weak condition, having fasted for 30 days.

The Irish Press, Friday, March 24, 1944

[This story was also untrue, the hunger strike didn't end until 6th April when the hunger strikers realised that both the northern and southern press were misleading the public as to the strike. Hugh was on hunger strike for 44 days.]

DERRY

Lt.-Col Sir R. Ross (U.U.)	36,602
H. McAteer (Sinn Fein) ..	21,880

Result, 1950 General Election.

Co-operation Urged by Former I.R.A. Chief

He had been forcibly impressed by the vast fund of genuine patriotism and real goodwill which he had found in circles unconnected with the traditional Republican movement, said Mr. Hugh McAteer, former I.R.A. Chief of Staff, in Belfast last night.

He was speaking at a reception held in St. Mary's Hall, organised by the Irish Republican Prisoners' Welfare Association to welcome himself and Mr. Liam Burke following their recent release from Belfast Prison.

In the work for the release of the political prisoners, he said, valuable and much appreciated help and co-operation had come from unexpected quarters at home, in Britain, and in America.

"Is it too much to hope," he asked, "that wise leadership will ensure that such co-operation for the limited objective of securing the release of the prisoners will be extended to the greater and final objective of securing the nation's release from the prison-house of the Empire? The greatest need in Ireland to-day is goodwill and co-operation."

He expressed the hope that they would soon welcome Seamus Steele, the last Republican prisoner in Belfast Jail.

Mr. L. Burke also spoke. Mr. C. O'Neill, Dublin, presided.

Devenish Gave McAteer A Rousing Welcome

Canon Coyle Pleads For Earnestness In Irish Cause

"I BELIEVE THAT IT IS THE DUTY OF ALL THE LEADERS OF POLITICAL GROUPS TO TURN THEIR BACKS ON PAST DISSENSIONS AND DIFFERENCES; TO EMPHASISE THOSE POINTS ON WHICH WE ALL AGREE RATHER THAN ON THOSE ON WHICH WE DIFFER, AND TO CONCENTRATE THEIR ENERGIES, NOT ON ATTACKING FELLOW IRISHMEN, BUT ON THE ELIMINATION OF THE SOURCE OF ALL OUR POLITICAL ILLS— 'THE CONNECTION WITH ENGLAND' ". STATED MR. HUGH McATEER, FORMER CHIEF OF THE I.R.A. AT A CEILI IN ST. MARY'S HALL, DEVENISH, ON SUNDAY NIGHT, UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE SOUTH DONEGAL-NORTH FERMANAGH COMMITTEE OF THE SEAN MacCUMHAILL MEMORIAL FUND.

Attended by over 400 people drawn from the counties of Fermanagh, Donegal, Tyrone, Leitrim, and Sligo, the ceili was organised with the permission of Devenish's patriotic and revered sagart, Very Rev. Canon Eugene Coyle, P.P., who was present to extend a hearty welcome to Mr. McAteer and to deliver a rousing appeal on the Irish-Ireland ideals to all present.

"I have allowed the committee to organise this ceili here," he said, "in order that the youth may not forget and that they may be inspired by the great men of the past, who played their part for a free Ireland. What we require in Ireland to-day is earnestness in the work that confronts us. It was earnestness to the cause that rid this country of landlordism and I believe that it is lack of earnestness to the cause that is holding the British in the Six Counties to-day."

BIG WELCOME FOR McATEER AND COMRADES

When Mr. McAteer, who was accompanied by Messrs. Jimmy Brogan, Buncrana; Tommy Campbell, Belleek; and P. P. Tunney, Mulleek and Letterkenny, arrived at the hall, the band struck up "The Felons Of Our Land," and the party were warmly feted as they approached the stage where Canon Coyle welcomed the Republican leader.

Mr. Campbell, who acted as chairman, speaking in Irish, said: "Tuiteann se ar mo chrann Aodh Mac a tSaoir a chur i n-aithne d'ibh. Is e seo chead chuir go Fear Monach agus is mor an maise d'ibh an Fíor-Failte a chur sibh roimh ar theacht isteach sa halla do."

"I have pleasure," he said in being able to introduce Mr. McAteer to you. This is his first visit to Fermanagh and the welcome you gave him coming into the hall is indeed a great credit to you. I am glad that Devenish should be the first place that Mr. McAteer should visit in Fermanagh", he said, "because it is without doubt the most Irish Ireland district in this county that has played, and is playing such a mean part in the struggle for independence. The importance of Devenish in the Irish-Ireland movement is due in no small measure to your revered parish priest, Canon Coyle, who has preached during his long time among you the gospel of nationality and has asserted Ireland's right to absolute freedom on every platform throughout the length and breadth of the land.

— I am sure —

Mr. McAteer. I feel sure, needs no introduction to an audience such as we have here tonight. Suffice it is to say that he is an uncompromising Republican who remained faithful all his life to the teachings of Tone, Pearse, Clarke and our own Sean McDermott, of Kiltyclogher. In his early boyhood he joined Fian-na Eireann, that great nationalist boy scout movement founded by a lady on the other side of the mountains outside Devenish, one of the Gore Booths of Lisadell—the late Countess Markievicz. Due to his activities in the Fianna he was arrested in 1936 and sentenced to 7 years penal servitude in Belfast prison. On being released in 1941 he again became active in the Republican movement and was arrested and sentenced to 15 years in 1942. He took part in the most sensational escapes ever from Belfast prison and while on the run he made a dramatic appearance in the Broadway Cinema, Falls Road, Belfast, and held an Easter Week commemoration ceremony there. He was captured later in 1943 and continued to serve his sentence until finally released unconditionally in 1949.

MR. McATEER'S ADDRESS

After expressing thanks to the committee for having invited him to say a few words about "that noble-hearted son of Tirconail, Sean MacCumhaill, a man who revealed and endeared himself to me in many capacities as a friend, a leader, a fellow-soldier, and proudest title of all, a fellow convict." Mr. McAteer said that Sean McCool belonged to that heroic generation who knew of the war of independence and the tragic War of Brothers, not in hisotry, but at 1st hand. Whilst

undergoing training in Dublin, one of his professors was murdered by Tans in his home at Drumcondra in 1921. He was one of the huge crowd assembled at Croke Park on a Sunday afternoon when Tans opened fire on players and spectators alike, a day that has gone down in history as "Bloody Sunday." On completion of his training he took up a position as teacher, but resigned rather than take the objectionable oath of allegiance—an oath that conflicted with his loyalty to the Irish Republic.

THE MID-NIGHT TREATY

It is not surprising, therefore, added Mr. McAteer, that when the mid-night Treaty was signed, that Sean McCool should once more take his stand on republican principles and in the subsequent fighting he served with courage as Brigade Adjutant in Donegal. Captured and interned at Tintown, he was one of the men who planned and took part in the greatest mass escape in Irish history, when some 150 Republicans tunnelled their way to liberty. With the defeat of the Republican forces and the end of the civil war, McCool immediately set to work to rebuild again the shattered units of the Republican army and was soon in command of the East Donegal Battalion and was actively engaged in organising work throughout Ireland. Terms of imprisonment under the Cosgrave regime followed, imprisonments during which he fought for his right to be treated as a political prisoner.

Captured amongst a group of officers in 1936 in the Crown Entry, Belfast, he was sentenced to five year's penal servitude and was twice on hunger strike in assertion of his right to political treatment. But, by now his health was beginning to give way under the hardships he had endured on the run, in internment camps, and in prison, and for many months he was confined to bed.

But his unconquerable spirit never faltered, added Mr. McAteer, and when he was released in the spring of 1940, he immediately resumed his activities—activities which ended behind the barbed wire of the Curragh internment camp where occurred one of those instances that proved his physical courage. When the guards opened fire on a group of internees, he dashed out and brought a wounded comrade to safety under a hail of bullets. Shortly after his release, late in 1941, he was appointed C.S. He was recaptured in May, 1942 and remained in interment until the general release in 1945. It was during those later years of the war that he underwent the greatest ordeal of his career—a seven week's hunger strike.

DAY TO DAY RECORD

Throughout that long fast he kept a day to day record of his experiences and wrote a document that deserves to rank high in prison literature. "May I express the hope," said Mr. McAteer, "that some day it will be possible to make that document known to the people of Ireland, the people for whom he was so willing and ready to die, the people for whom he did actually die when four years later, worn out by his sufferings, he breathed his last in his native Donegal.

After making the statement quoted at the outset, Mr. McAteer said that there were some who would say, as they had said, that men like Sean McCool acted unwisely. They challenged the validity of his actions, but none of them could deny the sincerity of his motives or his unselfish devotion to an ageless cause.

"And it is for that reason alone if no other that the memory of Sean McCool deserves to live on: for he represented in an age of materialism and self-seeking, a spirit of selfless love, disinterested devotion and wavering loyalty

to all "that was olden and beautiful in Gaelic Ireland." He represented in himself the Separatist in every walk of life.

"In Sean McCool we have an example of a life generously lived for Ireland; an example that might well be followed by the youth of his country. The task to which he dedicated himself is the task of all free men in every generation—the restoration of Irish freedom and Gaelic culture and the re-establishment of the Irish Republic; to put it more plainly, the task which death prevented McCool from completing and which lies before us, is the expulsion of the occupation forces—the setting up of of an all-Ireland Republican Government and the revival of the Gaelic language and culture.

"Freedom was his objective; it is our objective too; we seek nothing more than that, but, like him, we shall accept nothing less. It is no small task. It calls for men of the calibre of Sean McCool—for men who dare to dream of a glorious future for our nation, who are prepared to labour and suffer in order that the dream of ages might become a reality in our time. Sean McCool is dead, but his name lives on and his memory will be forever green and honoured where men are gathered in the name of freedom.

Concluding, Mr. McAteer warmly commended the work of the committee in seeking to have a monument erected to honour, rather than to perpetuate the memory of Sean McCool whose name and memory "are safe in the hearts of the people." He it was, and a faithful few like him, who made possible the proud boast : "The land of the O'Donnells shall not be the first to cry surrender."

A vote of thanks to Mr. McAteer was proposed by Canon Coyle, who spoke very highly of Hugh McAteer and Sean McCool and commended their ideals to all present. He gave a short talk on Ireland's history from Emancipation days and considered that the victory of the Land League was the most important event since then. He asked the youth not to forget the victories and suffering of their fathers and urged them to take a more active part in national affairs until complete freedom is won. He spoke of the importance of the games, dances and language and the part that the revivalists were playing in keeping the big question of freedom before the people.

Derry

ROBIN CHICHESTER-

CLARK (U.)	37,700
Hugh McAteer (Rep.)	21,123

Majority 16,577

Percentage poll 76.9 p.c.; total electorate 76,918: spoiled papers 370.

No change.

1959 — Chichester-Clark (U.)
37,529; Canning (Sinn Féin)
13,872; U. majority 23,657

Result, 1964 General Election.

Died at work in office

MR. HUGH McATEER (53), younger brother of Mr. Eddie McAtter, president of the Nationalist Party in the Six Counties, died suddenly while working in his office in Belfast last night.

Mr. McAtter, who was the proprietor of a travel agency in the Falls Road area, had not been ill and on Sunday last attended the ordination in Derry of his nephew, Hugh, eldest son of Mr. Eddie McAteer.

Mr. Hugh McAteer was first arrested for his political activities in 1936 and in the 1940s, when he was described as Chief of Staff of the I.R.A., he was sentenced to 12 years.

[Irish Independent, June 25th, 1970]

During his imprisonment he escaped and made a daring appearance in a crowded Belfast cinema and spoke from the stage to the crowded audience before escaping once again.

On his release from prison he returned to his native Derry and went into the travel agency business owned by Mr. Eddie McAteer. He returned to Belfast four years ago and started his own travel agency. In 1964 he contested the Co. Derry seat at Westminster unsuccessfully as a Republican candidate against Mr. Robin Chichester-Clark.

He is survived by his wife, Mrs. Nora McAteer; two sons, Brian and Aidan, and one daughter, Moira.



**Hugh McAteer at the time of
his escape from a Belfast jail
in January, 1943.**

(Picture from Tim Pat Coogan's
book "The I.R.A.")

Hugh McAteer is laid to rest

Thousands pay respects

MR. Hugh McAteer, the former Chief of Staff of the I.R.A., jail-breaker extraordinary, and a man on the run, who died last Wednesday, was laid to rest with full military honours in Milltown Cemetery, Belfast, on Saturday.

THE IRISH PRESS, MONDAY, JUNE 29, 1970

Former political prisoners from all over the country headed the 6,000 strong, mile-long cortege from Mr. McAteer's home in Crocus Street. And the people of the Falls Road turned out in their thousands to pay their last respects.

Blinds were drawn in private homes and business premises. Public transport was brought to a halt for more than an hour.

A guard of honour for the Tricolour-draped coffin was formed by ex-political prisoners from 'A' wing of Belfast prison, men who had shared a dreary prison existence with their chief-of-staff.

The Belfast Felons Club, formed by ex-political prisoners, was also represented, as was the Provisional Council of the I.R.A.

In his fight for the cause of Irish Freedom, Hugh McAteer was one of the few men ever to escape from Belfast Prison in 1943. The police put a price of £3,000 on his head.

While on the run, Hugh

McAteer made one sensational public appearance—on the stage of Belfast's Broadway Cinema where he read the 1916 Proclamation.

Oration

At the graveside on Saturday one of the men who escaped with Hugh McAteer, Belfast man Jimmy Steele, delivered an oration.

He spoke of Hugh McAteer's dedication to Ireland, his years behind bars, the punishment cells, hunger strikes, escape plans, and anxious days on the run.

"Hugh McAteer must surely qualify for that high place among the patriots of Ireland," he said.

Very Rev. Hugh McAteer, son of Mr. Eddie McAteer, the deceased brother, who is President of the Nationalist Party and former Stormont M.P., officiated at the graveside.

Representatives included Mr. Gerry Fitt, Republican Labour M.P.; Mr. Paddy Devlin, Northern Ireland Labour member for Falls; Senators Patrick Magill and Paddy Wilson, and Mr. Austin Currie, the Nationalist M.P. for East Tyrone.



Eddie and Sean (with glasses) escort the coffin of their brother, Hugh.



**Sean Keenan, Derry, (left)
at the funeral with Seamus
(Jimmy) Steele (centre)
and Paddy Donnelly, two
of the men who escaped
with Hugh McAteer.**

TYRONE FRIENE MOURN HUGH MacATEER

IN common with his friends all over Ireland, his acquaintances in Tyrone mourn the unexpected death of Mr. Hugh McAteer as a great loss to the nation and in particular as a cause of deep sorrow to the many workers in the sphere of national culture in all its forms of which Hugh throughout his life was so ardent a supporter. That he should have died suddenly while in the prime of life has come as a great shock to all who knew and admired him, and who had looked forward to having the benefit of his friendship and support and counsel for many years ahead. To his sorrowing wife and young family, as well as to his three brothers and other relatives, public condolence has been extended on a scale that reflected the widespread sense of mourning and loss. Hugh was a national figure and his name and work form part of the chronicles of our times. Striving unceasingly to secure the reunification of Ireland, he found it necessary to tread perilous paths that brought him long years of deep suffering and deprivation, yet he retained even in the darkest days a charity and understanding that left no bitterness or regrets. It is tragic to reflect that his untimely death was hastened by overwork, by giving long hours to the cause of furthering peace in strife-torn Belfast. Once his day's work ended in the office, long hours stretched ahead of him, attending meetings, going from street to street and door to door easing the anxiety of worried families, conferring with affected interests as to how best ensure that the dark shadow of trouble would not fall upon any district. Week after week he maintained this pace that was really the labour of three men instead of one.

[Obituary of Hugh by 'Oscar' published in *Ulster Herald*, 18th July 1970]

HE CAME quite often to Tyrone in the years after the early 'Fifties when released from Crumlin Prison after a long period he was in constant quest to speak at Feiseanna and Gaelic gatherings.

Many of his friends in prison had come from the county and most of these were able to attend his funeral from his Belfast home. He would visit Carrickmore frequently and also parts of East Tyrone, maintaining contacts with fellow-workers in the Republican movement which for several years he had headed as Chief of Staff of the I.R.A.

On these visits many others met him for the first time and were struck by the contrast between the mental picture they had of the Republican leader, and the man himself in reality. Hugh was modest almost to the point of complete self-effacement. Of his experiences he would speak rarely and then, in terms that did not invite dilation, preferring instead to turn an interview upon the questioner and adopt the role of the listener rather than the talker.

Former classmates

at funeral

SOME OF HIS Strabane friends had been with him in his schooldays when in the old Fourth Room of the Brow of the Hill C.B.S. Hugh was already noted for his deep interest in Ireland's history and for the enthusiasm with which he furthered his study of the native language.

In his funeral cortege to Milltown Cemetery many of his former classmates marched. I was fortunate to find myself with two of those and as we paced slowly in that impressive tribute to an outstanding Northman, I heard anecdotes of days long past and re-lived those years in the Brow of the Hill where Hugh was in the forefront of most of the school activity.

School memories



"DO YOU remember . . . ?" asked William McFerran, and indeed I did remember, only too well, the scene flooding back through the lockgates of memory.

Of Hugh forming a Cumann Diospoireachta with high standards and limited membership... of his neat plan to make for a few select friends a corner in the best of the Irish-Ireland books which Rev. "Brother" C. F. McGuinness had just acquired for the school library... of, but why go on.

Hugh was eager we should have the books before anyone else. "They won't appreciate them, and we just panting to get them" he said, as he outlined his plan that we should apply to the kind Brother for a book each, and then circulate it among ourselves (a thing forbidden by the library rules).

A lifelong Republican

HUGH was a native of Derry City and the family home in William St. was where the family of four brothers grew to manhood.

His parents were Donegal-born and his father was a native speaker of that beautiful limpid Gaelic that one associates with the beautiful Fanad peninsula. Hugh was the third youngest of the family and like his brothers passed to the Brow of the Hill immediately after leaving the Infants School in Francis Street conducted then, as now, by the Sisters of Mercy.

On leaving school he chose commerce as a career and developed his interest in the Republican movement. He was prominent in activities in the city for a few years and when a young man received a long sentence of imprisonment for possessing explosives. Thus began a period of hardship and danger.

He suffered much



HE was not long released when he was interned on the pretext that a war-time "United Kingdom" could not afford to have dangerous Irishmen at large on their own doorstep.

Hugh did not accept prison regulations nor did he acknowledge any right to deprive him of his liberty. In this firm stand he was joined by comrades in the political wing of Crumlin Prison, and the inevitable consequence was that to formidable jail regulations was added the terror of the punishment cells. Hunger-strikes, demonstrations inside the jail and other forms of protest attracted little public attention beyond that of the prisoners' relatives and friends. Public opinion turned in other directions and the lonely fight in Belfast Jail went largely unrecorded.

A memorable prison break

AND then headlines were made that rang round the world. Hugh and his friend Mr. James (Jimmy) Steele escaped from the prison, then one of the most heavily guarded in these islands.

They got out, by means not yet fully known, and went to earth in Belfast. The kindness of a Presbyterian family in sheltering the fugitive Hugh was afterwards recalled by him with proudful gratitude. From end to end Belfast was searched by police and soldiers and secret service, but they might as well not have bothered. Of the escaped men—injured in their attempt—not a trace was found.

The search extended to Derry and further afield. But to no avail. As the days passed, public interest grew less and the authorities turned to other matters, while hoping that something would turn up.

World headlines for ~~~~~ daring leaders ~~~~~

SOMETHING did turn up. And when it did, there were red faces and short tempers at Stormont, police headquarters and at British Army intelligence.

Hugh and Jimmy coolly walked one Saturday night into the Broadway cinema on the Upper Falls and Hugh spoke from the stage urging the crowd to support the Republican struggle. They then vanished into the black-out, and as the news of the daring defiance spread, another dragnet was put over Belfast...But with the same result as in the first case.

The two men had got clean away.

Hugh would have been at liberty for long enough but for a chance meeting with a fellow Derryman. On this event neither Hugh nor the family ever said much. Hugh was uncommunicative about it when I asked him one time about it. He just shrugged his shoulders, eyed me quizzically and said in Gaelic "We'll just pass over any i about it."

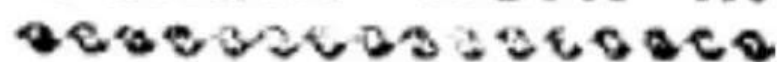
Never a harsh word

~~~~~  
**O**F his work as Chief of Staff I cannot write, because our paths diverged and for some years I did not meet him. But I can say this: that he held throughout on the only course which he considered to be the rightful one for Ireland.

He was total in his belief that this island's destiny is to be reunited, not only so far as political division is concerned but in the merging of heart and minds. Towards those who were opposed to Republicanism he had a sympathy and plainness which he felt that they misunderstood. His true position and that in time they would come to recognise their true interest lay in helping all-Ireland to progress.

Never speaking harshly of his opponents, always counselling his associates to remember that whatever the views of others might be towards them, they all were Irishmen, children of the one nation. Republicanism in his view was a movement that was trustee for the national rights, and as such its members had a special duty not to speak ill of those whom they sought to

## Gallant work in



## Belfast



**F**OR several years he was associated with his brother Mr. E. G. Mac Aiger in the latter's travel agency business in Derry, and then less than four years ago Hugh decided to move to Belfast and establish a branch there.

He quickly made many new friends in that friendly part of the city, as well as renewing contacts with the many who had served with him on dangerous duty. Firm, and sincere, the aura of his achievements and end in the one cause

gave him a special place in public esteem and esteem.

And thus it was that when the red days of tumult and destruction, of violent death and intimidation returned to the Falls

borne on the wings of that accused sectarianism against which his whole life had been a protest, Hugh MacAteer stood forth as the prudent and experienced leader whose counsel could be so valuable.

Working a full day in his office, he barely took time at home for evening tea until he was out in the streets visiting the sick, comforting the worried and counselling the worried and organising committees concerned with protecting public

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**D**ERRY felt itself specially bereft when news reached the city that Hugh MacAteer was dead, and had his funeral been by Foyleside it would have been memorable indeed.

Edt. Eilias mourned in impressive manner, and the sorrowing thousands included friends from all parts of Ireland, old Republicans and the younger, fellow workers in the Gaelic League four decades ago, men who had served with him on G.A.A. committees and other organizations. Faithful Jimmy Steele was there too, and his evocative oration simple and clear was a fitting tribute to a gallant comrade and fighter.

Now where he had more  
of friends, will for  
the sturdy figure with  
strong ring to his voice  
and the penetrating glance as one  
from whom there have been proud and  
privileged to know.

# **Mr. Hugh McAteer**

R.I.P.

**I**T is difficult to realise that Hugh McAteer has passed away. After the shock news of his very sudden death had reached us we realised that we had lost a very sincere friend and loyal comrade.

And Republican Ireland a devoted son.

Born in Derry City, he became involved at an early age in Irish-Ireland activities, which eventually led him into the ranks of Fianna Na Eireann. Later, he graduated into the ranks of the Irish Republican Army, and his activities therein soon brought him under the notice of the Special Branch men of the R.U.C. Raiding his house, they found some explosives and for this he received a seven-year sentence in 1936. He was 19 years old at the time.

Released in October, 1942, after serving five years and three months with time off, he became active again in the ranks of the I.R.A. In a short time after his release he was appointed Chief-of-Staff. In October, 1943, he was again arrested after walking into

a police trap arranged by a close friend and neighbour. Charged with Treason Felony — a common charge in those years—he was given a 15-year sentence.. Three months after his arrest, i.e., 15th January, 1943, along with Pat Donnelly, Portadown, the late Ned Maguire and Jimmy Steele, Belfast, they made a sensational escape from Crumlin Road prison, for which a reward of £3,000 was offered for their capture, and the photographs of all four appeared in the newspapers and on all police boards throughout the Six Counties.

He was again appointed Chief-of-Staff less than three months after his escape. The Broadway Cinema was taken over by a unit of the Belfast Battalion of the I.R.A. on Holy Saturday and an Easter Commemoration



Ceremony was held. Slides were shown on the screen announcing the nature of the ceremony, whilst Hugh McAteer and Steele appeared on the stage.

The Proclamation of 1916 and a Statement from the Army Council was read by both men. The vast audience cheered enthusiastically at the finish. During the ceremony the police were stopping persons outside the Cinema and making them produce their identity cards. After nine months' freedom he was again arrested in October, 1943, and was not released until August, 1949.

He contested the Co. Derry seat for Westminster as an Abstentionist on two occasions and recorded a very high poll.

He was a founder member and member of the Editorial Staff of "Republi-



can News'' and penned an article for the first issue. He was a trustee of and adviser to the Irish Republican Felons Club and also a member of the Patrick Sarsfield G.A.A. Club.

The huge gathering of Republicans who attended his funeral was indicative of the very high esteem in which he was held by all his old friends and Comrades, and a numerically strong, disciplined parade, with Tricolour-draped coffin, flanked by a Guard of Honour, bore him to his last resting, where a nephew and namesake newly ordained, Father Hugh McAteer, said the last prayers over his coffin, and a bugler, Mr. Dan Campbell, sounded the Last Post. Jimmy Steele and Rory Campbell delivered brief orations at the graveside.

Imeasc Laocrí Agus Mairtíri Na  
nEireann Go Raibh a Anam.