

FORTRESS BRUFF

According to the historian, Dorothy McC Ardle, Casualties in Ireland in two months from January 21st to March 31st, 1921 " were estimated as follows: British Forces Killed - 174; wounded - 288 Irish Volunteers and Civilians Killed - 317; wounded - 285.

There were at that time, about twelve thousand young Irishmen in Prisons and military detention camps throughout Ireland and England. About twenty of those prisoners were from the Bruff Grange area, most of them having been killed during the Caherguillamore massacre. In March, two Mayors of Limerick had been brutally murdered in the presence of their families. One of the pillars supporting that bloody regime was located in Bruff. In the Fair Green, to be precise.



Most of you will be familiar with the triangular Fair Green of Bruff. In its time, in many ways a priceless amenity, an oasis between busy roads, a safe tranquil place in which to play or rest. A site for carnivals and circus. A place that should never have been built upon!

Visualise that pleasant Fair Green, occupied by one hundred British soliders, Professional soldiers, most of them

veterans of the Great War (World War one) members of an army ready to make war anywhere in the world, where British interests were threatened. So we must assume, it was perceived that British interests were threatened in Bruff and the surrounding district. Hence the presence in our midst of those men of war.

Kahki clad, in a heavy wool tunic, and knee length pants, puttees, hob-nailed boots, full 1908 pattern web accoutrements to carry 150 bullets, a 14" knife - bayonet, entrenching tools, steel helmets and armed mostly with the trusty Short Magazine Lee Enfield rifle. A formidable presence to face the threat of Joe Neilan, Pateen Cremmins, Dinny Conway, Dick Fitzgerald, Dave Cremmins, Jim Moloney and a few other local lads, for the most part unarmed and lucky to have five or more bullets per man, even if they were lucky enough to have a rifle or pistol.

There was in those days a second gate which faced the lane beside Collin's, (Keatings Bar), inside that gate stood the cookhouse, made of sheet iron, built around a timber frame. Beside the cookhouse stood the Officers' Mess Tent, nearest the cookhouse so that food would arrive hot, next to the mess and just about opposite the wrecked Courthouse stood the non-commissioned officers and men's dining marquee and beyond that in the Camass corner, a field latrine. A few yards down from the Officers' Mess Tent stood the flag pole, around its base a neat ring of white washed stones was placed. Around the middle area stood about ten bell tents to house the main body of N.C.O.'s and men.

Near the Camass Road Gate a formal square was marked out on which routine parades would have taken place. Just inside the Camass gate and also inside the Collinstown Gate a Sentry Box was located. All around the top of the wall was a thick tangle of barbed wire, the two gates were strengthened by sheet iron. The troops stationed there were regular British Army, and perhaps less rabid than the Black and Tans and Auxiliaries, terroist squads billeted in the nearby R.I.C. Barracks. Being regular troops drawn from the King's Own Liverpools and Welsh Fusilliers, the ceremonial of flag raising and lowering Guard Mounting and other day to day parades would have been observed. As well as of course sending out patrols, escorts, ration parties, etc. of Company strength i.e. about one hundred to one hundred and twenty, all ranks at any one time. One third of their number would be resting off, one third, on duty or operations and the remainder on stand to.

Reasonable arrangements for such a formation would be: four medium machine guns, ten light machine guns, ninety rifles, twenty revolvers, and of course bayonets, smoke and H.E. grenades. Very-light pistols and twenty thousand rounds of assorted ammunition.

One of the medium machine guns, a Vikers, was mounted on the roof of the Barracks, just down the street. Right across the road, in front of the Barracks, there was a high and heavy barricade, surmounted by barbed wire. Just enough space for one vehicle at a time to pass.

This barricade was manned at all times by a mixture of "police" and military. Things were so good you would wonder why they ever left!

L. Sertorius