

Reminiscences of Army Life

By "Steelback"

CHAPTER 9

Getting to Know the Irish

There was still lots to learn. Guards, picquets, patrols, all kinds of fatigues, fire drills, manoeuvres, grave digging, and so on.

Yes, we had to dig graves for any of our comrades who died. A corporal and six men would be detailed from the company to which he had belonged, to go to the military cemetery and prepare the last resting place for the body of their departed chum.

I found that I had more time to myself now, so I used to go for long walks, being careful to avoid places "out of bounds", places to which we were forbidden to go. Some chanced it, but invariably they got caught and were punished for disobedience.

Personally, I found Ireland a pleasant place. A few miles from the barracks, in the vicinity of Kildare, is to be found some very beautiful rustic scenery. The country folks were quite friendly to a soldier (unless he was on eviction duty) which was another matter.

I became acquainted with some of them, old folks mostly, who seemed to be having a hard struggle to make both ends meet. They depended upon the potato crop for a living in most cases, and if this failed, which it sometimes did, things went rather hard with them.

A little present of tobacco made me many friends, and the heart of many a dear old Irish lady have I made glad with such a gift.

Most of them smoke, and in the evening time, when the weather was fine, they would be seen sitting outside their little cabins placidly enjoying the fragrant weed and seemingly without a care. But what a life. Its sameness must have been appalling to many of them, and yet, in a way, these poor people were happy.

The old Irish piper. He is pictured in my mind even to this day. I can see him sitting outside the door of his little cabin, built of mud and turf, with the old, and well seasoned, dhudeen hanging from his lips. A jolly old chap. Brimming over with tales of his boyhood days. "Ah," he would say, "What with the gals and the fights we had a good time—but that's all over now." He squeezed a few more bars of "Old Dog Tray" out of his bagpipes and watched my face to see what effect it was having on my auditory nerve.

It is a very difficult task to look pleased when you are undergoing the torture of an auger going in at one ear and coming out at the other. However, his suspicions were not aroused that I was doing anything else other than experiencing the greatest pleasure from his efforts. A word as to the pipes. The bag was not as big as that of the Scottish bagpipes. The pipes were not as long. The bag rested on the player's left knee and he was sitting down whilst playing.

I got to know quite a few of the people living within walking distance of the barracks. They always greeted me cheerily with "How do, soldier", and would talk about all kinds of subjects. The people that I met when walking out, strangers

to me, always greeted me in their own courtly way. How different in the cities.

A "General Order" having come through that the Lieut.-Governor of Ireland was shortly to make an inspection of the division, of which we were a part, great activity was shown towards brushing things up. The first item in our battalion was the retirement of the Colonel. He had reached the age limit. His removal caused many regrets. He was very mild and even-tempered man. I had heard that in his youthful days he was of a fiery nature but at the time of his retirement his fiery nature had died down, and it was for the benefit of the regiment, really, that he was retired. Discipline was getting very lax, and it was entirely owing to the forceful characters of the adjutant and the sergeant-major that it survived. The senior major, a very eccentric man, took over the command. He will appear on several occasions in this narrative, and I am sure that you will agree that he was eccentric, alright.

CHAPTER 10

Some Humorous Incidencies

Definite orders were issued that a general field day would be held. The day arrived. We paraded very early in the morning as we had a long way to go. The morning was fine and gave promise of a warm day, so that we anticipated feeling tired by the time we had reached the place assigned to us, which was on the road to Wicklow. It turned out as we had expected—we were both tired and hot. Luckily, from our point of view, we formed part of the reserve, and were ordered to pile arms and lie down, a hardship that we endured with stoical indifference. The balmy atmosphere was very seductive, and that, combined with the soft carpet grass, had a tendency to induce slumber. Having no orders to the contrary, the majority slept, and during our period of unconsciousness two things happened that we wouldn't have missed for worlds, so to speak. It appeared, from what we learned later, that our newly appointed commanding officer, being anxious as to the progress of the battle, wandered forth on his faithful steed "Billy" to see for himself. His curiosity took him too far, and he was captured by two of the enemy vedettes. "Billy" had never been known to go faster than a trot, but on this occasion he gave a display of energy that surprised even the colonel. Suffice it to say that the colonel broke away from his captors, and "Billy's" burst of speed carried them both to safety, and those who witnessed his approach were surprised at the adhesive qualities displayed by the Colonel.

Another incident occurred during the absence of the colonel of which we learned later. From what we were told it would appear that a battalion of reserves was needed to strengthen the front line, and an umpire was sent, in all haste, to bring up the much needed support. He came up to our battalion, but seeing us slumbering so peacefully, he turned to one of the officers remarking "No, don't wake 'um, rode away and secured the necessary support elsewhere. We heard nothing further of the incident officially, but we were called the "Don't wake 'ems" for a long time afterwards, but it, like other nicknames that had been bestowed upon us—such as "The Primroses"—nobody could find any solution to this. The Bailiffs was another. We acquired the latter name owing to small parties be-

ing detailed to assist the bailiff when he was evicting some poor unfortunates that couldn't pay the rent. Nasty job that.

Kit inspection

Our new colonel decided to have a kit inspection—his first since taking over the command, so he following order appeared in the battalion orders:—

The Battalion will parade at 11 a.m. tomorrow in heavy marching order for inspection by the Officer Commanding. All available men to attend. Kits will be shown.

It will be noticed that in this order no references is made regarding non-commissioned officers. Usually, in the battalion, on a parade where every available man had to be present, it would state in battalion orders that corporals and lance corporals would be in the ranks too. This omission led to an amusing incident.

A description of the valise worn at that time, or pack as it was called, will explain the embarrassment of a corporal of my company at this inspection.

The valise in use at this time was shaped something like a lady's handbag, the kind that open at the top and have a handle. Take away the handle, and fix a flap to cover the opening. This is as near as I can describe it. In this would be put socks, towel, holdall complete, trousers, brushes, and down each side the boots would be put. To get them in at all the tops would be turned in and the boots would be pushed in heels first. Any man wearing a size 9 boot had the greatest difficulty in packing his valise, as the cape, partly rolled, would rest on the toes of his boots. The remainder of the cape would lie underneath the flap of the valise when closed. It will be seen by this that if longer boots were used it would be impossible to close the valise properly.

The hero of this story had a cushey job. He hadn't been on parade for a long time. He was a tall man and wore a size 12 boot. These were made for him by the regimental shoemaker as no boots of this size were issued. Seeing from the orders that N.C.O.'s were not mentioned, he, naturally enough, assumed that he wouldn't have to show kit, so not bothering to borrow a smaller pair of boots to help fill up his valise, he borrowed a pair of wooden lasts from the shoemaker. These lasts were size 8's, the bottoms being covered with iron from heel to toe, and constant use had made the iron smooth and bright.

The corporal got ready for marching order and went on parade. When the "Fall in" sounded he took up his position with the other N.C.O.'s in the third, or supernumerary rank. The Captain, after he had inspected the company, gave the order, "Corporals and Lance Corporals in the ranks. This meant that they would have to show kit. Imagine the dismay of the corporal on hearing this. However, there was no help for it. He took his place on the extreme left, and laid down his kit, and it was the first time for over two years.

The first to notice the lasts was the Colonel. No pun intended. He stood some distance away, and it so happened that the sun was shining and was reflected by the polished iron on the bottom of the lasts. It was the glitter of this which attracted the attention and he came over to see what it was. The Captain, on the approach of the Colonel, called the company to attention. The Colonel told the Captain to stand the company at ease. He stood looking down, very intently, at the corporal's kit. Presently he turned to the Captain saying "What are those things Captain?" pointing to the lasts.

The Captain, who apparently hadn't noticed anything amiss, looked down at the lasts, and then turned towards the colour sergeant and pointing to the corporal's kit asked "What are those things colour sergeant?" No-no-Captain, the Colonel said, I'm asking you.

The Captain said that he didn't know what they were. The Colonel then said to the colour sergeant—Please explain. The colour sergeant told him what they were, and what they were used for. The Colonel then asked the man why he hadn't got his boots in his kit.

The corporal explained his difficulty. The inside of the valise was measured, and then the size of the corporal's boots. It proved that the valise was too shallow by over three inches. The Colonel, turning away said, "This man to parade every Wednesday at this hour in marching order, and to show his kit." In a few minutes he was back again and said "This man need not show his boots." He did this for one month.

VOTE - NO

One year may not be long enough for a good council-- But it is too long for a poor council.

The present system of annual Municipal Elections has in the main given Ontario municipalities good Municipal Government. A safeguard for continued good municipal government is to retain the right of annual Municipal Elections.

Under the present system, if the people who pay the taxes are satisfied with the performance of a municipal council they have the privilege of avoiding an election by giving the council an acclamation.

Under the two term legislation, should a vacancy occur in council in 1942, the new member or members are appointed by the remaining members of council, not elected by the people.

The most democratic system, is the present one of annual Municipal Elections.

The Two Term Legislation, with its vicious provision for the appointment, not election of men to fill vacancies, is a threat to one of our most democratic privileges — the right of annually saying who will spend the ratepayers money for the coming year.

Bureaucratic government can come into existence so very easily in these days of turmoil, we must be always on guard. To lengthen the term of municipal councils under the proposed legislation could easily become an open invitation to bring bureaucracy into the realm of municipal office.

TAKE NO CHANCE ON A TWO YEAR TERM — VOTE NO

Retain The Right of Annual Municipal Elections

"Are you in favour, as a Wartime measure, under the Government Extension Act, 1940 of the municipal council elected for 1941 holding office for two years?"

YES

NO

X

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