

Curragh History Archives



Irish Independent
17th May 1922

IRISH TROOPS TAKE OVER CURRAGH CAMP

**LARGEST CAMP
OCCUPIED**

TRICOLOUR HOISTED

**YESTERDAY'S HISTORIC
SCENES**

BRITISH SOLDIERS LEAVE

The Curragh Camp, the greatest British military station in Ireland, was taken over by Irish troops yesterday morning. British troops marched out of the camp for the last time, whilst the soldiers of Dail Eireann, under Lieut-Gen O'Connell, mounted guard and saluted the Tricolour, which replaced the British flag.

There was little ceremonial, and the great depot, which is to be used as a training school for the Irish Army, is now occupied by a large garrison.



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THE GREATEST DEPOT

The Curragh embraces about 5,000 acres of what was known as Crown lands. It had always been the greatest military depot in Ireland, and one of the finest training grounds in the three countries. It is ready for immediate use. There are several rifle ranges, machine gun ranges, bombing quarters, etc. Here and there the strongly fortified redoubts constructed during the hostilities are in evidence.



The Handover Group, Lt-Gen O'Connell and Lt-Col Sir F. Dalrymple

Normally there is adequate accommodation for about 20,000 men, but in the summer months, when the troops are under canvas, there would be accommodation for 100,000.



**The Tri-Colour was raised on the Water Tower
at 12 O'clock, noon, 16th May 1922**

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Additional Handover Information:

Ballyfair House, some two miles south of the Camp, the residence of the General Officer Commanding, was handed over to the Irish Government some weeks prior to the handover of the Curragh. Lieut Liam Collins was in command of a small party of about ten other ranks, detailed for the task of taking over Ballyfair, which traveled from Marlborough Hall by truck. Lieut-Gen. J. J. O'Connell accompanied the party and heavy sleet was falling as they approached the Curragh. Private Paddy Jordan was a member of the group even though he was only fifteen years old and he still remembers the bitter cold of the day. They missed the Ballymany turn off and proceeded to the Kildare hairpin bend and entered the camp from the west. On reaching the Water Tower, the truck turned to the right and proceeded to Ballyfair via the Brownstown road.

On arrival at their destination, a British guard of two officers and sixteen to eighteen other ranks were found to be in possession of the house. Collins was directed to proceed with the takeover as Lieut-Gen. O'Connell talked to the officers. Jordan recalls his conversation with one of the British sentries: "we discussed the details of an ambush in which he had been engaged in—he did not think much of the actions of the 'Black and Tans'."

The formalities were concluded in ten to fifteen minutes and the British party marched out. Lieut. -Gen. O'Connell returned forthwith to Dublin leaving Ballyfair to Lieut Collins and his men. That evening Collins "was obliged to purchase bedding from Messrs. Todd Burns, Curragh Camp, to meet immediate needs." During the succeeding weeks, prior to the takeover of the Curragh, the small garrison from Ballyfair called to the Camp on a few occasions to visit the Catholic Home and Sandes Home. Ballyfair House was used as an assembly area for Irish troops destined to take over the Curragh. Capt Sam Irwin recalls how he was one of "a party of perhaps 100 all ranks" - assembled there about two days prior to the handover.

Tuesday, the 16th of May, 1922, was fixed as the date for handover of the Curragh Camp and by that date the occupying British Forces had dwindled to about 2,000 men. On Monday evening the Union Jack was lowered for the last time on the Water Tower and all flag staffs in the camp were cut down. This act was not as sinister as it may appear as it was accepted as normal military practice to do so when evacuating a military post. This incident was to get a considerable press coverage in the days that followed together with the report "that the Board of Works officials who proceeded to erect a staff on the Water Tower were not only prevented from doing so but actually arrested." the press reported that no confirmation of this incident could be obtained.

An advance party of Irish troops, about 80 strong, arrived on Monday by train from Dublin and was accommodated overnight in Hare Park Camp. Capt. Hugh McNally and Lieut Eamon Prendergast were part of this group and for them the journey had a particular significance as the last time they had seen

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the Curragh was from the back of a lorry as it transported them to Mountjoy in chains. The advance party was joined at Hare Park that night by Lieut-Gen. O'Connell, Assistant Chief of Staff, Comdt. Bisette and Capt. O Byrne. The troops at Ballyfair also moved into Hare Park on the 15th of May.

As early as 3.30 a.m., Tuesday, 16th May, the remaining British forces were about busily engaged in the final packing up:

"The whirr of motors were everywhere, and soldiers in shirt sleeves ran about loading them up. Rain now began to fall, and by 9 o'clock all roads from the great camp were filled with lines of marching British troops, whilst motor lorries, armoured cars, in all numbering over 300, soaked wet and begrimed with mud, made their way Dublin-wards. The infantry, composed principally of the Leicesters and Northampton Regiments, proceeded to the railway sidings, at the Race Course, and entrained for the metropolis."

As the British forces marched out detachments of Irish troops arrived from Kildare. Comdt. P. A. Mulcahy- commanded a detachment of North Tipperary, Laoighis and Offaly troops which detrained at Kildare that morning and arrived into camp "to see the tail of the British column departing."

The precise time of handover of the camp was fixed for 10 o'clock. At the stroke of ten a party of Irish troops marched out of Hare Park camp. Lieut. Gen. O'Connell took his place at the head of the column and when they reached Staff House, on the western edge of the Camp, they were met by a group of British officers headed by Lieut.Col. Sir F. Dalrymple. Having exchanged formal greetings the senior officer of each group "talked and walked to Beresford Barracks" now Ceannt Barracks, where the handover took place. Lieut-Col. Stockwell, C.B., and Comdt. Cronin proceeded to the southern side of the camp, and the formal handing over on this side of the camp took place. Col. Skinner, Camp Comdt. for some years past, supervised the withdrawal of the British guards "maintained up to 10 o'clock, when on the approach of the Irish troops, they lowered their rifles and marched out of the various posts." The British guards boarded trucks and followed the main body on the road to Dublin.

Along the road to Dublin, crowds turned out to see the British cavalcade pass. One reporter expressed great regret at "the removal of the splendid fire engine." It was a fair day in Naas and a large crowd watched the procession for over-an hour. "Union Jacks flew from every lorry, several machine guns were at the 'ready' and many light armoured cars were also in evidence." Comdt. Barra O'Briain¹⁷⁴ recalls passing the tail of the British column at Moorefield Cross Roads, Newbridge, as he marched to the Curragh with a contingent of Irish troops from Kilkenny. Comdt. O Briain and his party had detrained at Newbridge, station and he remembers catcalls from the passing British cavalcade and he cautioned his group, "steady men, if our positions were reversed we would feel the same way." the group made its way on to the plains where he recalls seeing a party of senior British officers, on the left of the road, looking back towards the camp with field glasses. I believe the GOC,

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Curragh, was in this group.” As he marched past the British party hoarded their car and departed.

The formalities of the handover completed, Cols. Dalrymple and Stockwell departed by car and “within five minutes there was no sign of khaki on the Curragh.” It was also observed that it was 70 years “since the place was so empty and desolate. By noon the wide expanse of the camp, which on occasions had been peopled by more than 20,000 soldiers, was left in the possession of but 500 Irish troops.

Capt. Sam Irwin recalls the excellent state in which the departing British troops left the camp, even the billiard tables in all the messes were brushed clean.

At 12 o'clock, noon, Lieut-General O'Connell climbed the Water Tower to hoist the tricolour. A truck had been dispatched to the Board of Works to procure a flag staff and from this staff the tricolour was hoisted, while all present rendered honours. “The operation, which was carried out with difficulty on the improvised flag staff, occupied a considerable time.

The handover of the Curragh Camp completed, the happenings of the day were now but unrecorded history.