



Countess Markievicz arrives at Liberty Hall in Dublin marking the return of Irish Republican prisoners from England in June 1917. UCD ARCHIVES PETER PAUL GALLIGAN PAPERS

# ‘Carry yourself as soldiers’

**‘YOU** are soldiers, and bear yourself as such. Hold your heads up and march as smartly as if you were on parade – taking no notice of anyone, and looking neither to right or left”.

These words of advice were offered by Michael Mallin, commandant of the garrison occupying St Stephen’s Green, to the Irish Citizen Army women attached to the garrison, having received the order to surrender. As they left the Royal College of Surgeons, they received “great ovation” from the crowd who had gathered.

Their comrades, members of the Inghinidhe na hÉireann branch of Cumann na mBan stationed at the distillery at Marrowbone Lane with Éamonn Ceannt’s battalion, also marched alongside the Volunteer soldiers. However, the 22 women under their officer in charge, Rose McNamara, chose to surrender alongside the men, the only group of women who did so.

McNamara “presented herself to the British officer in charge, announcing they were part of the garrison and were therefore surrendering with the others”, thus ensuring that they would be arrested. The women were held at Kilmainham Gaol for a week and comprised the majority of the 77 women arrested and detained following the Rising.

Nell Gifford explained the thinking of many of the women who were arrested: “The Republic promised us equality without sex distinction, so we were all adjudged soldiers, women and men, whether we worked as dispatch carriers or Red Cross units”. The women did not view their arrest as shameful. Indeed, the



## Emma Lyons on the fate that met the female rebels after the surrender in 1916

opposite was very much the case. Helena Molony’s friends joked that her relatively brief imprisonment had been “specially hard on her” as she had “looked forward to it all her life”.

Those arrested as a result of their activities in the Rising maintained that they were prisoners of war, not convicts, and therefore not like ordinary criminals. Senia Pasetta has argued that the women’s social background may have contributed to, what she has termed, “their sense of their own elevated status”.

One such example was Brigid Lyons, who “refused to share a cell with an ‘undesirable person’” (a prostitute) and was subsequently moved to a room of her own, thus suggesting that the gaolers likewise “endorsed the existence of social segregation within the prison”.

Similarly, Dr Kathleen Lynn maintained that when she and three others were transported to Mountjoy, they were “hailed rather with joy by the wardesses because we were interesting prisoners. We were not like ordinary criminals”.

While the majority of the women were treated well

during their internment, the execution of the leaders of the Rising greatly affected them, as they could hear the shots from their cells. Winifred Carney recalled that early on the morning of May 3 she was: “awakened by the sound of firing and, in the after stillness, a low clear voice gives the order to quick march. They must be below our cell window ... My heart sinks, for I know the first of the executions has begun ... but for many mornings to come we shall awake to that close noise of rifle firing and the crisp voice of the officer in command”.

In an effort to keep up their spirit, the women sang songs, including ‘Die Wacht am Rhein’ and ‘Deutschland über Alles’, and danced Irish dances during exercise in the yard, which was soon banned by the prison authorities.

The majority of the 77 women arrested during the Rising were released within a week; 56 were released on May 8, with a further seven released by May 10. On June 26, five women – Winifred Carney, Brigid Foley, Helena Molony, Ellen O’Ryan and Maria Perolz – were transported to Lewes

Prison in England under the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) “on the ground that she is of hostile association and is reasonably suspected of having favoured, promoted or assisted an armed insurrection against his majesty”. Countess Plunkett and Dr Lynn were also deported to England under DORA, and were to reside at specific addresses at Oxford and Bath respectively, to be agreed with authorities.

Following an announcement by the Home Secretary, Herbert Samuel, in which he stated that it was likely that many of those who had taken part in the Rising “were kept in ignorance by their leaders and thought they were being called up for a route march on Easter Monday”, Foley and Perolz, along with 860 men, were released in July 1916. Carney, Molony and O’Ryan were not released, instead being transferred to Aylesbury Prison. Countess Markievicz was subsequently transferred to the same location from Mountjoy on August 7. O’Ryan was released on October 17 and Carney and Molony on December 23, in a general release of female prisoners.

Countess Markievicz was not released at that point due to her life sentence, her death sentence having been commuted on account of her being a woman. The last female prisoner, she was released in June 1917.



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