

*From Blundeston*

## And the Wall Came Tumbling Down

JOE HOGAN

IN MY STORMY JOURNEY through gaol life I had lived strictly on my side of the "unsurmountable" barriers erected by staff and inmates, you know, the wall that is built brick by brick made out of a mixture of fear, distrust, hatred, ego, slander and lies, each brick carefully and firmly planted so that the finished structure appears in the minds of both walls' participants to be unassailable. This type of barrier to understanding is also built up between officer and officer, con, against con, and neither side can visualise a breach being made. However, these barriers are not so formidable as the mind has falsely made them out to appear as I have found out during the last few months at this prison.

One such wall I and another P.D., A, had erected against each other appeared to me to be absolutely impossible to surmount as on both sides pride was the type of brick used, but even prideful

walls can be breached as the following story will reveal.

I have been a sufferer from heart trouble for many years and my personal vendetta with the medical officer forbade me asking for medical aid, consequently when I was ordered to load a tractor I had perforce to refuse, which I did so in a manner consequent with the psychopathic aggression I am unfortunately afflicted with. My reason for this outburst was from frustration at knowing I was not able to do the heavy task and would have to get medical permission to get excused. I refused to lower my pride and went into a seclusion—which was far from monkish—in fact my rage at being forced into this position forced the "wall" up higher. I refused the medical officer permission to examine my fitness for punishment, as I had firmly fixed in my mind his very obvious antipathy toward me owing, no doubt, to the fact that I had threatened violence once. I was tried that morning by the

governor who, despite a very large measure of respect for me, refused to deal with me until he had received a medical report. In a rage I stormed out of the office fully determined to spend the rest of my time on "chokey" informing the governor of my intention.

I spent the next hour marching up and down the "peter," my ever-lively emotions all aswirl as my past two years fled through my fevered brain. I had travelled a long hard path of self rehabilitation in the past year, started the Never Again Association and was still the chairman; whatever I did today always had to take into full account the feelings of others—especially the N.A.A. members. Only the last meeting I had strongly advised the all-out bid to overcome staff distrust and antipathy towards the inmate by means of N.A.A. attendance and here I was faced with my own refusal to work, or be medically examined—at that moment I realised the size of the "wall" I had built. The group would regard me as a phoney, all the good I had been doing would cease and I would revert again, what could I do? I couldn't possibly lower my pride and allow this son of a bitch to give his phoney diagnosis—no never!

Never? I saw him next morning and allowed him to examine me only, I pointed out, "out of respect to the governor". I had made the first concession. I had made this

decision because of several factors—factors that could not be overlooked or disregarded as of no consequence. (1) My position as chairman of the N.A.A. (2) My respect for the chief engineer, Mr. Dawes, who was a member of our association and who had come to expect a little maturity in my thinking. (3) Members of the group coming to visit me in the "chokey" and asking me to reconsider my decision not to leave the "block" until my time had run out. (4) The fact that something big was expected of me—I had to disregard self in this matter, pride of which I have more than my share had to be discounted. (5) I had to agree to something I heartily detested—lower my flag to authority.

I knew what the medical officer would say when he examined me: "Nothing wrong—A.1." I wasn't far wrong. He informed the governor that my heart was sounder than his. I have not given in to the medical officer because I know he is wrong and I am correct, however, I had taken the first step, I had allowed him to examine me—spurious though the diagnosis was. The governor saw me later and informed me of the medical officer's report. I listened and asked him why he could believe my word I had given not to escape, yet not take my word that my heart was "dodgy". His answer: "I am forced to take the professional medical report." I knew that it would be

a gamble to do heavy labour so soon after a heart strain—I had had a bad strain at Christmas as a result of 'flu—but I agreed to do a little. I was cautioned.

My thoughts then were heavy with doubts as to the possibility of keeping my word. I would be considered by the rest of the party as having "swallowed it" (backed down). I had to work at loading a tractor alongside A, with whom I was now on bad terms—we had been friends. The "wall" was high in my mind between us, could I breach it? The time came for the test when I came out to work, I took one look at A then realised I couldn't work with him and be bad friends at the same time—something had to go. Lower my pride—not me! I shirked the issue for the rest of the afternoon sitting in the toilet, my mind almost cracking under the strain, my nerves getting ragged, my emotions boiling up to the pitch where I would have to erupt in a violent outburst and at that stage Mr. Dawes found me: "Everything O.K. now, I'm glad." His face dropped a foot when I let loose a flood of emotional explanations: "I haven't got the spunk to lower my f—— pride Fred, I have been sitting here for the last hour trying to find the courage to apologise to A for falling out and I just can't walk over there to him." I concluded with: "I'll smash somebody or something up, I'm at the end of my tether—why should I have to lower my pride". I was in a right state—

a state that I felt sure would end violently. I felt as though I had been backed into an impossible situation, I felt as frustrated as hell.

Mr. Dawes realised what a problem I had on and wisely left me to make my own decision, but he was a very perturbed and disappointed man. Everybody was trying to help me and I couldn't help myself. Disturbed, I wandered over to Bob the P.D. doing the hospital window cleaning—he had a very wise mind, one that I had always paid a lot of attention to—he was a guy who knew the score nearly always. I told my story of misery and anger to this wise Scotch owl who promptly, in his careful precise manner, pointed out what ought to be done. He was so right! I had to march straight up to A, apologise and offer to bury the hatchet. If I didn't I would be a coward—if I did lower my ego I would be a better man for it—I would win a battle against my baser self. I marched up to A, apologised—it was accepted by A who seemed embarrassed and pleased—we shook hands and another "unsurmountable" wall came tumbling down.

I know that in this incident I came off best. I gained a maturity I had not previously possessed. I was helped by staff to reach this understanding. I have never before experienced a situation in which a problem of this nature can be resolved in the way it was with the governor, the staff and the inmates

all helping me to conquer my problem. Previously, the conflict built up inside me would have remained there and would have influenced me to act in such a way that I would have ended up behind a locked cell door. My record of mutiny, violence, and escape, stand to prove this.

At this moment, with a year of never ceasing mental conflict behind me, I was able to do the mature thing.

I have progressed so far today that this last emotional and mental conflict constitutes for me almost a final step in my complete rehabilitation. My journey through this prison's progressive confines has resulted in almost a complete metamorphosis of personality, it has given me the chance of finding myself, in fact, of becoming much nearer to the desired end result of

a progressive group counselling—a whole person.

I owe much of this reformation to the loyalty and understanding of the assistant governor who is liaison officer to the Never Again Association and who, after a very rocky and stormy beginning to our personal relationship, stuck it out to become my friend and counsellor. I owe much to the kindness and loyalty of the group members, which included chief engineer Fred Dawes, who played a big part in my decision to come up from the "chokey".

Everybody helped me to help myself and the prevailing system provided this situation. It is my hope that in the future more and more prisoners will be afforded the help they need, in the way that I have received it in my present situation.

## Contributions

FOR THE NEXT ISSUES  
OF

### THE PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL

to be published quarterly in January, April, July and October  
should be sent to the

#### EDITORIAL BOARD

H. M. PRISON SERVICE STAFF COLLEGE

LOVE LANE, WAKEFIELD

as early as possible