

Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

*A special programme, in the form of a “letter”, written and compiled by Roddy Maclean, and specifically aimed at Gaelic learners who already have some knowledge of the language. A short vocabulary and comments on points of grammar and figures of speech are included with the text. If you have comments, Roddy can be contacted by e-mail at rodny.macleam@bbc.co.uk **

Annas a’ bhliadhna naoi-deug is sia-deug (1916), thug atharrachadh anns a’ Chogadh Mhòr buaidh air obair na mèinne-iarainn ann an Ratharsair. Cha robh e furasta don chompanaidh a bha a’ ruith na mèinne, Bairds, an obair aca a dhèanamh air sgàth cion luchd-obrach. Cha robh muinntir an àite pailt co-dhiù, agus leugh mi gu robh trithead ’s a sia dhiubh air falbh ann am feachdan na rìoghachd. Gu dearbh, chaidh fichead ’s a dhà dhiubh a mharbhadh.

Bha sin dona gu leòr ach, gu nàiseanta, bha cùisean duilich ann an naoi-deug is sia-deug (1916), oir ’s ann an uair sin a thòisich cogadh nam bàtaichean-aiginn. Bha na bàtaichean sin a’ cur fodha mòran de na soithichean-cargo a bha a’ toirt stuth a-nall a Bhreatainn à dùthchannan thall thairis. Agus am measg a’ chargo a tha sin, bha clach-iarainn a bhiodh air a toirt thar a’ chuain ann an cruth amh, agus an uair sin air a giollachd ann am Breatainn airson iarainn agus stàilinn a dhèanamh.

Aig àm a’ chogaidh, bha iarrtas a bharrachd nan àbhaist ann airson iarainn – airson armachd is uidheamachd-cogaidh. Mar sin, chuir Ministrealachd na h-Armachd sgeama air chois airson tuilleadh iarainn is stàilinn a dhèanamh bho chlach a bh’ air a mèinneadh ann am Breatainn. Ach ciamar a bha Bairds a’ dol a dhèanamh barrachd iarainn à clach à Ratharsair, mura robh luchd-obrach gu leòr aca?

Bheachdaich iad air mèinneadairean a thoirt a-nall à Portagal, às an Spàinnt no à Nirribhidh ach, aig a’ cheann thall, shaoil iad gur e prìosanaich-chogaidh Ghearmailteach a b’ fhasa dhaibh. Sgrìobh fear de cheannardan na companaidh chun na Ministrealachd, ag ràdh gu robh trithead ’s a dhà taigh anns an eilean a ghabhadh cuairteachadh le uèir bhiorach, airson prìosanaich a chumail nam broinn air an oidhche, agus gu robh fichead taigh falamh eile ann, anns am faodadh na geàird a bhith a’ fuireach.

Dh’obraich Bairds a’ mhèinn as leth an Riaghaltais agus dh’aontaich an Riaghaltas riutha suas ri dà cheud prìosanach Gearmailteach a thoirt dhaibh airson obair a dhèanamh innte. Chaidh feachd bheag de dhusan saighdear a chur a Ratharsair airson smachd a chumail air na prìosanaich. B’ e an commandair aca fear air an robh “an Caipitean MacLeòid”, ged nach urrainn dhomh dearbhadh co-dhiù bha ceangal aige do Ratharsair. ’S dòcha nach robh. Bha e air a bhith na sgoilear aig Colaiste Fettes ann an Dùn Eideann.

Ach rinn na h-ùghdarrasan mearachd leis a’ chiad bhuidhinn de Ghearmailteach a thagh iad. Bha iad air a bhith nam maraichean còmhla air

soitheach-cogaidh, am Blücher, anns a' Chuan a Tuath, nuair a chaidh a cur fodha leis na Breatannaich anns an Fhaoilleach, naoi-deug 's a còig-deug (1915). Nuair a chaidh na longan Breatannach a dh'ionnsaigh a' Bhlücher airson cobhair a dhèanamh air na maraichean Gearmailteach, airson an togail far na mara, nochd plèana agus Zeppelin Gearmailteach os an cionn. Feumaidh gu robh an fheadhainn a bh' air bòrd nan itealan dhen bheachd gur e soitheach Breatannach, seach Gearmailteach, a bh' ann an èiginn agus thug iad ionnsaigh oirre. Cha deach a shàbhaladh ach dà cheud is seasgad (260) duine a-mach à còrr is mìle agus ceud.

Chaidh ochd duine deug de na maraichean sin a Ratharsair ann an naoi-deug 's a sia-deug (1916), ach bha iad anns an eilean dìreach deich là. 'S e a bu choireach ri sin an teagal a bh' ann gum biodh buidheann de mharaichean a bh' air fulaing còmhla buailteach oidhirp a dhèanamh gus teicheadh thar na mara bhon eilean.

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Faclan na seachdainne: pailt: *plentiful*; gu nàiseanta: *nationally*; Ministrealachd na h-Armachd: *Ministry of Munitions*; bheachdaich iad: *they considered*; mèinneadairean: *miners*; nam broinn: *inside them*; falamh: *empty*; geàird: *guards*; as leth: *on behalf of*; dusan: *a dozen*; maraichean: *seamen*; an Cuan a Tuath: *the North Sea*; os an cionn: *above them*.

Abairtean na seachdainne: air sgàth cion luchd-obrach: *because of a lack of workers*; gu robh trithead 's a sia dhiubh air falbh: *that 36 of them were away*; 's ann an uair sin a thòisich cogadh nam bàtaichean-aiginn: *it is then that the submarine war started*; a bhiodh air a toirt thar a' chuain ann an cruth amh: *which would be brought over the ocean in a raw state*; air a giollachd airson iarainn agus stàilinn a dhèanamh: *processed in order to make iron and steel*; iarrtas a bharrachd nan àbhaist: *more demand than usual*; gur e prìosanaich-chogaidh Ghearmailteach a b' fhasa dhaibh: *that it was German prisoners-of-war that was easiest for them*; a ghabhadh cuairteachadh le uèir bhiorach: *which could be surrounded by barbed wire*; bha e air a bhith na sgoilear: *he had been a student*; nuair a chaidh a cur fodha: *when she was sunk*; airson cobhair a dhèanamh air X: *to provide assistance to X*; airson an togail far na mara: *to pick them up from the sea*; cha deach a shàbhaladh ach X: *only X were saved*; gum biodh iad buailteach oidhirp a dhèanamh gus teicheadh: *that they would be likely to make an effort to escape*.

Puing-ghràmar na seachdainne: a' cur fodha mòran de na soithichean-cargo: *sinking many of the cargo vessels. You will be aware that the Gaelic word cargo is derived from the English "cargo" and is a relatively recent addition to the language. It is sometimes spelled carago, reflecting the pronunciation, but mostly it is not. Why not? The reason is that the word cargo just asks to be pronounced "carago" in Gaelic because of a phenomenon known as the Svarabhakti Vowel (try saying it ten times quickly and it sounds like a severe medical condition!) The name originates in Sanskrit, a language in which it also occurs. Put most simply, it is the (unwritten) repetition of a (written) vowel sound. A good example is gorm. This is pronounced "gorom" but the second vowel is not written. Other examples (with approximate pronunciations) are dearg ("jerek" or "jeruk",*

red); morghan (“moroghan”, shingle); anmoch (“anamoch”, late); searbh (“sherev”, sour); crannchur (“kranachur”, lottery). But why not simply write the vowels? There is a historical issue here, but also an orthographic one related to the change in vowel quality because of inflexion. For example, gorm in its slenderised form is guirm eg còmhdach an leabhair ghuirm (the cover of the blue book). Guirm is pronounced “gooroom” because the second vowel faithfully repeats the first. If we were to write the Svarabhakti Vowel, “gorom” would become “guiruim” which is orthographically problematical. It is easier and more supportive of orthographic conventions to leave the vowel unwritten. It is a pitfall for learners only in their early days, and is fairly quickly understood and mastered.

Gnàths-cainnt na seachdainne: thug atharrachadh anns a’ Chogadh Mhòr buaidh air obair na mèinne-iarainn: a change in the Great War influenced the work of the iron mine. Tha X a’ toirt buaidh air Y: X has an effect/influence upon Y.

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