

W.S. 1031
ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURÓ STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 1031

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21
STATEMENT BY WITNESS.

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 1,031

Witness

John J. O'Reilly,
Rahenagurren,
Gorey,
Co. Wexford.

Identity.

Member of Irish Volunteers and of I.R.B.,
Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford, 1914 - ;
Adjutant, 3rd Battalion, North Wexford Brigade,
1918-1920.

Subject.

Irish Volunteers, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford,
1914-1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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STATEMENT OF MR. JOHN O'REILLY,
Rahenaguren, Gorey, Co. Wexford.

I am writing this account of events, which happened in Enniscorthy from 1914 to 1916, in the year 1954 and, of course, dates of events will probably not be exactly correct. but I am going as near to exact dates as I can now remember, after such a space of time.

I went to work in the Enniscorthy Co-operative Stores in April, 1913, and, shortly after, became a member of the Irish National Foresters and attended a number of their uniformed church parades in Arklow, Bray, Wexford, etc. I also was a member of the Gaelic League during this period, 1913-1916.

About April, 1914, The O'Rahilly and Mr. Judge held a meeting in Enniscorthy and formed a company of the Irish Volunteers. I joined about a week after this meeting, and we held a number of parades in the Foresters' Hall each Wednesday night. We went through a course of close order drill under Sergeant Darcy (an ex British army man). Seamus Rafter was then Company Captain, and Seamus Doyle was Company Adjutant. On a number of Sunday evening we had a parade in the show grounds. The United Irish League had, I understood, issued some instructions to their members (and A.O.H.) to keep clear of the Volunteers but, as it seemed to have got a grip on the young men of the country, their leader (J.E. Redmond) seemed to think well of coming in with the Volunteers; and, after making some arrangements at General Headquarters, the United Irish League and the Ancient Order of Hibernians came into the Volunteers in

great numbers until there were, I believe, three companies in Enniscorthy. I still remained a member of A. Company (Rafter's).

When Mr. Redmond made his famous speech at Woodenbridge, advising Volunteers that their duty was to go to Flanders to fight the so-called enemy (Germany), of course, the organisation was split from top to bottom. Practically all the members of A. Company (Rafter's) remained loyal to the old organisation and succeeded in getting possession of most of the arms in the possession of the organisation. There was nearly being a few scraps over getting some of these arms from the men who went over to the United Irish League portion of the organisation.

In July, 1914, I was approached and shortly after became a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and most of the members of A. Company were members of the organisation.

There was then, of course, two different Volunteer organisations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish National Volunteers. The European war was on and there were a number of recruiting meetings for the British army; and we of the Irish Volunteers were hostile to these meetings and took down a number of posters and sometimes interrupted meetings, but generally our members were instructed to keep away from them as some of the boys would be interrupting and only get themselves in trouble. The National Volunteers got a number of old Italian rifles, which were really useless as I don't think there was ever any ammunition for them and some of them were minus essential parts, locks, etc. A number of the National

Volunteers joined the British army about this time. Most of our training during this time, 1914-1915, was done indoors in "Antwerp", which was recognised as Volunteer headquarters.

In the summer of 1915 Paul Galligan came to Enniscorthy to work in a drapery business. His employers were not in sympathy with the Sinn Féin or Irish Volunteer organisations and, as he had been a member of the organisation and had gone through a good course of training in Dublin, he joined our Company as Captain "O'Reilly" and was always referred to under this name by all the members. He could not come out openly with us but called together, I think, about twenty-six of A. Company, including the officers. He stated that, if the day would come (which we all believed was near) for a fight against the enemy (Britain), we would have too many men and not enough officers. He, therefore, started training these twenty-six men, including officers, and we then were known as the Officers Training Corps. We did one night each week in Antwerp for lectures, etc., and another night each week out the roads, or sometimes in the fields, putting into execution what we had learned the previous night inside. This was a fairly extensive course of training and, when we came out on parade with the Company for Manchester Martyrs' night in 1915, we brought out all the arms and equipment we could muster and we seemed to make such an impression on the young men, and particularly on the members of the National Volunteers (Redmond's) that we immediately got a number of recruits.

During the winter of 1915-1916 most of our members were training two or three nights each week and went for a

route march and had field exercises most Sundays. In fact, most Sundays I got up and went to last Mass in uniform and went for route march after dinner.

During the winter of 1915 I was appointed Equipment Officer, and about twenty-five men paid one shilling per week, and each fortnight we were able to buy a single barrel gun with fifty cartridges. These were drawn for, and we had about eighteen guns in the Company before 1916.

In the early spring of 1916 nearly every man of military age in the country got a circular from Lord Wimbourne (then Lord Lieutenant of Ireland), appealing for recruits, to which was attached a form to fill in, offering their services to the English army. It appears someone filled in a couple of these forms and put a couple of men's names to it in Oulart. These two men were called up and, when they did not answer the call, they were threatened with arrest. A number of our A. Company went to Oulart each night for a week to resist the arrest of these men. I expect the R.I.C. expected trouble; anyhow, they never attempted the arrest of these men.

All during this winter of 1915-1916 we were getting all the arms and equipment we could. I might mention that any member of the Company, who could obtain any arms or ammunition, had only to go to Seamus Rafter and he supplied the cash to purchase anything which was serviceable. All the shotgun cartridges which could be got were loaded with buckshot. Patrick Keegan had a couple of men working nearly wholetime on this work, and a number of others gave a hand in the nights and during half-days.

About this time I got my uniform which I wore for

the first time at O'Donovan Rossa's funeral in Dublin in November, 1915. We were under the command of Brigadier Seán Sinnott and Captain Seamus Rafter and Bob Brennan. This was the first time I had seen Volunteers out with rifles and ball ammunition, which were in the possession of Irish Citizen Army and Dublin Volunteers. By the way, each man bought and paid for his uniform - I think twenty-eight shillings and sixpence.

Early in 1916 we had a big parade and a contest for the best section of sixteen men. Captain Thomas Weafer, Dublin (an Enniscorthy man, killed in the Rising in Dublin), brought down a section for this contest but, better still, he brought down a number of .380 n. plated revolvers with fifty rounds for each. I obtained one of these revolvers with fifty rounds and had it up to the Rising. I was always inclined to talk and jump-around in my sleep. In fact, in 1913 I had jumped out through a window on to the street when dreaming; and immediately before the Rising we were instructed not to let ourselves be arrested, to resist. I was sleeping in the room with another man, who was not a member of any of the organisations, and each night, when going to bed, I put a belt over my night-shirt on which I put a pouch containing the .380 revolver. I meant having a go at the police if they should have come for me and were in the room when I wakened. Some night I would start giving out in my sleep and this other fellow would start shouting to waken me. I did not understand this until all was over, when he told me he never slept a wink for a month, afraid I would start shooting across the room and hit him. I did not think he knew I had the revolver at all.

Immediately before Lent in 1916, P.H. Pearse gave an Emmet Commemoration Lecture in the athenaeum in Enniscorthy. We had the building under an armed guard that night and were prepared to resist any interference by R.I.C. or other authorities. This was a great success, with concert.

About the same time P.H. Pearse held a parade of the whole Wexford Brigade on Vinegar Hill. This was a very large parade and in charge of Brigadier Seán Sinnott, Wexford.

On Easter Sunday, 1916, most of the I.R.B. men had a good idea of what was afoot, and Enniscorthy and district men were mobilised at Antwerp. I understand we were to march to Clonroche and have a manoeuvre there with Ross Company which was to finish in the village when we would take over the barracks and any equipment there, and then march on and occupy Enniscorthy. But a lady came off the train that day (Sunday) and she came to Antwerp with, I think, Rev. Fr. Patrick Murphy (then in Mission House), and she handed a despatch to Seamus Rafter countermanding all previous orders. This finished the Rising at Enniscorthy planned for Easter Sunday, 1916. I believe Captain O'Connell (afterwards Colonel, National Army) was to take control (representing General Headquarters) of Wexford, Carlow and some other counties. He was present at this parade on Sunday and later that day left Enniscorthy.

On Easter Monday, of course, all knew that the boys were out in Dublin and there was a number of staff meetings.

Early on Tuesday morning I was called and ordered to go with orders to Oulart for the Oulart Company to come

to Enniscorthy that evening and to bring in anything they had, guns, ammunition, etc. It had then been provisionally decided to take over the town on Tuesday evening. I was also ordered to go to Monageer and instruct a man there (I think William Kelly) to bring in 400 rounds of .303 ammunition which he had there for safety.

This Tuesday was fair day in Enniscorthy and, on the way out, I met Edward Lacey, then O/C, Oulart. I gave him the order, and he told me he had to go to the fair with a cow, but he would be home by noon and instructed me to give the order to his Lieutenant, with instructions to warn the men for mobilisation at 3 p.m. When I was returning to Enniscorthy, the tyre of my bicycle burst and I had to walk the last mile. When coming to the junction of road (in Enniscorthy), of road from Oulart with road from railway, I saw three R.I.C. men coming from railway station. These three R.I.C. men were looking at me strong, and I had my revolver very handy in pouch which was open. I let a horse and dray which was behind me, come between me and the police, and from the corner of my eye I saw them dropping behind the car. I then moved quicker in front of car, and when about fifteen yards in front of car I heard a quick step behind me. I thought it was one of the R.I.C. men and, when I felt a hand on my arm, I pulled out the revolver and had almost fired at the man, over my shoulder, when I heard: "How did you get on?", and realised it was Lacey, whom I had met that morning going out. My face must have mirrored the shock which I felt when I realised I had almost shot one of our own men in the public street in noon-day. I let a few furious swear words at him, and he saw the revolver in my hand and cleared away. I think

this was the biggest fright I got during the whole campaign. Myself and James O'Brien (afterwards shot by Tans in Rathdrum) had been going to Oulart each Sunday to train the men out there and also to utilise what we had learned during the week from Paul Galligan's officers training corps. This served two purposes, training these men and also ourselves.

When I returned to Enniscorthy at about 11 a.m. on Tuesday (Easter Week), I was ordered to mount guard, with a number of others, on Patrick Keegan's, Irish Street. There was a dump at the back of the house, built into the raised ground at back. Most of the stuff which had been in different parts of the country was being assembled there with what was already in the dump. There were a number of men there during the day. We were, of course, armed with shotguns and revolvers because we were not going to let the stuff be taken in a sudden raid by R.I.C. or others. Captain O'Connell, G.H.Q., came there during the evening and, after members of the Staff talking with him, it was decided not to go ahead with what had been already provisionally decided. I remained on guard there until late Wednesday evening when I went to my lodgings to get some sleep.

During the day, Tuesday, word came that the Ferns men were on their way in and were at Ballinahallin Wood. Sandwiches, etc., were got and sent to them, and when the start of the rising was called off for that evening, they were ordered to return home.

Late on Wednesday evening Paul Galligan arrived from Dublin. He had a map of the city and had all the places occupied by the I.R.A. marked on this map. He had been with the boys in the city and decided to come to

Enniscorthy and bring out the boys there. When he got to Enniscorthy, he held a meeting of the Staff, to whom he made a general report about the position in Dublin, and it was decided to go out on Thursday morning, which was done.

About 8 a.m. on Thursday the I.R.A. took possession of the Athenaeum and established headquarters there. Paul Galligan, Robert Brennan and Seamus Rafter were the senior officers in control, with Seamus Doyle as Adjutant. The Republican flag was hoisted on headquarters and saluted with bugler and firing party. Myself and John Moran (afterwards murdered by Tans in Dundalk) were sent up to Herstburne road with four men. We were instructed to halt enemy forces and take them prisoners, but not to fire on them until they attempted to do so on us. Where we were placed, we were too far from the enemy to challenge them when they sallied out with rifles after hearing the firing of the salute at headquarters. They came up Castle Hill and, when challenged, opened fire, which was returned. They worked down the back way and eventually got to their barracks. When they got there, our forces fired on the barracks from which fire was returned. We, with our forces on Herstburne road, now also opened fire on the barracks and sent a number of rounds through windows and roof. After about an hour's firing, the R.I.C. put out a white flag and, when firing stopped, they brought out one of their garrison who was wounded and left him on a chair. Some of our ambulance men, with a couple of Cumann na mBan members, went down and conveyed the wounded R.I.C. man to hospital. Immediately after this man was brought away, the white flag was withdrawn and

there were occasional shots fired at the barracks. The fire was returned on a few occasions.

About a month previous to Easter Week, Captain O'Connell, G.H.Q., had held an examination of all existing officers with members of Galligan's officers' training corps. This examination consisted of each candidate parading A. Company in different formations and detailing each order. Later in "Antwerp" there were a number of military questions which each man took down and answered on paper. On Thursday of Easter week Commandant Paul Galligan commissioned a number of the men who had gone through the previous examination. With me was commissioned Denis O'Brien, Enniscorthy, James O'Brien (before referred to) and John Moran (also referred to). We held the town and set up an administration. T.D. Sinnott (afterwards County Manager) was in charge of outposts. Michael de Lacey set up a police force, mostly men beyond military age. My work during most of the Thursday, Friday and Saturday comprised posting outposts on the different roads, arranging reliefs and inspecting them periodically.

On Saturday it was decided by the Staff to occupy Ferns and later Gorey, and eventually link up with Dublin. A force of about forty men (mostly Ferns men) under Commandant Paul Galligan went on Saturday evening and occupied Ferns. I had volunteered to go there and, just before the party moved off, Commandant Rafter insisted on my remaining in Enniscorthy.

At about 7 o'clock on Saturday evening, Commandant Robert Brennan ordered me to take a party of six men to Edermine. He expected a number of men from Wexford town. In fact, he was led to believe they were on their way and

it had been reported to him that a party of six R.I.C. men were about Edermine Cross. I was ordered to contact them and prevent them from attacking the Volunteers from Wexford. I went with my six men to Edermine Cross and scouted the roads around both sides of the Cross and for a mile further to Wexford, and did not contact either R.I.C. or Volunteers. The latter did not leave Wexford.

On Sunday morning, April 30th, a despatch was brought, under a flag of truce, from P.H. Pearse, advising Enniscorthy to surrender. This despatch, when delivered, was thought to be an enemy ruse, and the late Seán R. Etchingham and Seamus Doyle went in a car, with a truce flag, and saw P.H. Pearse. When they returned with confirmation of the order, a meeting of the Staff was held and it was decided to surrender; but, in the meantime, the men were ordered to put, if possible, the arms and ammunition in a safe place; and all the useless guns, pikes, etc., were left there, for seizure by the enemy forces, as the arms which we had.

About eleven o'clock on Sunday night I went to my lodgings and had a very much needed night's sleep. When I awoke about ten o'clock on Monday morning, I found British military, accompanied by some of the Wexford (so called) National Volunteers (Redmondites) were arriving in town. I got up, dressed, had breakfast, got a bicycle and proceeded to my home at Ballygarrett, fourteen miles away. I was just passing the outskirts of the town, when the military were posting sentries on the roads and preventing anyone leaving town without their permission. I had just got clear. These outposts were composed of one British soldier and one member of the

National Volunteers. These Volunteers were ironically known as Donovan's Light Brigade; their Captain was a man named Donovan from Wexford.

I was at home until Tuesday, May 2nd, when I was arrested by four R.I.C. men from Clonevan barracks and brought by car to Gorey R.I.C. barracks. There I was closely questioned by two Sergeants and a Head Constable. It appeared that they had heard the name of a Captain O'Reilly, a very prominent officer. This was Paul Galligan, already referred to. But they had the wrong name and they seemed to think that I was the man they wanted. I refused to give them any information, only that I was out in Enniscorthy and I knew nothing about anybody. I was brought to the day room repeatedly and questioned. During the evening and night, about twenty-four men from Ferns and Camolin areas were brought in. One time when I was in the day room, they brought in Matt Kent, Ferns. Matt had Irish kilts in the house, with badges, and also a Confraternity medal and ribbon. These were all dumped from a sack on to the floor, with Kent. The Head Constable started questioning Matt who looked very innocent. The Head Constable asked him was he a member of any secret society. Matt answered him, very innocently, "Yes". The Head Constable asked what was it. "The Confraternity of the Sacred Heart", said Matt.

On Wednesday (May 3rd) morning I was taken out, handcuffed and, with three R.I.C. men, brought to Arklow where I was handed over to the military. James O'Brien, Morriscastle (already referred to) and a couple of the Ferns men were there. I was brought before three officers there on two occasions; they were trying to get from me

that I was Captain O'Reilly. An R.I.C. man - one of my escort - said he saw me drilling men in Oulart. I admitted this, and said that anyone could drill men without being an officer. Later in the day the other prisoners were brought from Gorey. At about six o'clock that evening we were marched - twenty-eight altogether - from the military station to the Quay where we were put aboard . . . H.M. trawler "Aurania". A considerable number of Arklow people, men, women and children, lined the route and cheered us loudly. This surprised us, as most of the men in Arklow had then been working ^{in Kynoch's munition factory} and some in the British Navy. The British officer was very vexed at them cheering us and threatened them with a revolver, and had his men put back the crowd with bayonets.

We were put aboard and, guarded by Blue Jackets, were brought to Dún Laoghaire. There the morse signals passed: "Who are you?" "H.M. Trawler with twenty-eight Sinn Féin prisoners." "Don't know anything about you." Eventually the signal came - "Proceed to North Wall at once". This we did and, when we were put ashore there, we were taken over by a military escort.

We were all now hungry - the time was about midnight. The officer asked us where we were from and, when we said, "Wexford", he asked us did we win down there. Someone answered, "If we had won, we wouldn't be here!", and he said, "I suppose not". He eventually got us a number of loaves of bread and a couple of buckets of water. He said this was the best he could do. We were kept there in a long passage, with a gate at either end, until daylight when we were marched to Richmond Barracks.

We crossed O'Connell Bridge, and O'Connell Street

was still smouldering and looked a desolate sight in the dawn light. We were put in Richmond Barracks about twenty to each room. There were then a large number of prisoners at Richmond and a number of spotters were moving around through the prisoners, picking out the leaders for court martial. I saw Seán McDermott being brought across the yard, also Count and Countess Plunkett, John Sweetman, Kells, and a number of other prominent people. Each morning we received 1 lb. tin corned beef and a couple of biscuits, like dog biscuits. This is all we received except water and one bucket of tea until the following morning. '

We were kept there until the following Monday, 8th May, when we were brought to the North Wall and put aboard a cattle boat. We were brought to Holyhead and entrained there. The party, which numbered 1,000 prisoners, were booed and cheered through the street of Dublin - different receptions in different places. Of course, there was a large number of Separation Allowance people (families of British soldiers) who booed us, but the big majority of the people of Dublin cheered us. We landed at Holyhead at about six o'clock in the morning and were divided into about two equal lots of 500 (of which I was one of the 500 brought to Stafford Jail, the other 500 being sent to Wandsworth Jail). We arrived in Stafford about eight o'clock in the morning and were marched through to the jail. There were a good number of the South Staffordshire Regiment killed and wounded in Dublin, and a large number of the people (especially women) gave us a hostile reception.

It appears that, according to the list of prisoners, I should have been with the lot sent to Wandsworth, and

as his name was called, each prisoner was marched to a cell. When all were gone, I still remained, and the Staff Sergeant enquired how I came to be there, or what should be done with me. I suggested he should send me home, but he didn't accept that suggestion.

We were not allowed out of our cells that day, but the next morning the warder (Corporal Webb) brought me out and tried to put me scrubbing the flagged landing outside the cells. I had the idea that we would do no work, and started mauling the flags with a wet rag. After some heavy swearing, the Corporal said no wonder we couldn't beat the British army when we couldn't scrub a floor. He got down on his knees and gave me a demonstration of scrubbing, and put me at it again. In the meantime, a Lieutenant came up to ask him about something and, when they were engaged, I got the bucket of water and swished it on the flags. Some of the dirty water went over the boots of the Sergeant and Lieutenant. The Sergeant made a rush at me and gripped me by the coat collar. He brought me to the cell door and fired me against far wall and said, "Stop there, you bastard till you rot". I was delighted with my ruse in getting out of working for them. But after a few days, I regretted this because the prisoners did do a little work, scrubbing and polishing the railings and, when doing this, they were hours out of the cells and could often get a few words with each other. The Corporal never gave me anything to do. He would say, "You, bloke, know how to do nothing".

After a couple of days we were brought out to the Yard for parade around. We were supposed to keep four paces apart and not to talk but, after a few days, this rule was not recognised at all and we mixed all over the

yard.

When we were in Stafford about three weeks, a few had been released and there were about fifty Galway prisoners brought in. They were about two weeks there before they would talk with us, having been warned that spies would be put in as prisoners to get information from them. They were very careful about this until they got to know we were all right.

About every month a General came down from London to inspect us and, when the Staff Sergeant tried to get us in military formation for the General's inspection, we would not or could not be got into any semblance of military order. He used some strong language about our non military bearing. But later when Alfie Byrne, Dublin, and Laurence Ginnell, M.P., came to visit us and we fell in under our own officers, the Sergeant got a great surprise and then began to understand we were deliberately refusing his military order. The General, after inspection, always got up on a raised position to address us. He had a powerful accent and what he would be saying sounded like, "Wa, wa, wa, wa", and the boys would then "wa, wa, wa" after him; and the Sergeant and Staff would get all flurried and try to stop this but could never properly succeed. The General would say, "I came down here from the Wa Waffice to hear if you have any complaints". He would then enumerate the complaints he did not want to hear; this was every possible thing anyone could complain about. Then afterwards we would read on paper that the General had been at Stafford Jail and there were no complaints.

We were in Stafford nearly a month when we discovered

there was a similar jail in the same compound which was full of Dublin men. I was not long there when a letter was delivered to me from my wife in Dublin and it appears I had three children there. It was about a fortnight later I found out there were actually four of the one name prisoners in Stafford, and the wife and kids were not mine at all. Neither was the fine loaf of bread I got by post one day shortly after the letter and which I made good use of for myself and a couple of the lads. After about a month all the prisoners in the two jails were allowed to associate together. The people outside thought we were a frightfully tough crowd. Even the Rev. Fr. Moore, who came in to us, told us, from reading the local English papers, he was very nervous coming in to us the first time. In fact, he was surprised when he found that practically all the men were well educated, refined, decent fellows.

During the time we were there, we got a paper in one day on which was published the sinking of the ship with Lord Kitchener on board. Darrell Figgis got us and read this out for us in the exercise yard and we cheered to the echo. The staff and armed guard outside the railings were disgusted with us for cheering the death of their War Minister.

Early in June we were told to get our things ready for removal to Frongoch, but the next day some of the boys had put something on their faces which developed a rash, and the doctor suspected measles and we were then kept in Stafford until 29th June.

On the 29th June we were marched from jail to the railway station under escort. I remember an Enniscorthy man in front of me (I always thought this fellow had an

extra large tongue), but, when going up the steps to the station, about five foot high, there was an Englishman on the top step who looked very hostile. The Enniscorthy man rammed out the big tongue at him, and the Englishman made an effort to strike the prisoner. The soldier (escort) was swinging his right hand and struck the Englishman on the point of his jaw, and when I was entering the door I saw him falling down on the top of his head the whole five feet. We eventually arrived in Frongoch and, before we were distributed to the huts, we were very minutely searched and also our belongings. We were then delighted to meet a lot of other prisoner, some of whom their friends thought had been killed in Dublin.

We had much more freedom and association in Frongoch and it was a welcome change to be out in open country after confinement in a jail in a town area in enclosed walls. Captain M.W. O'Reilly was prisoners' Commandant there, and each hut of twenty prisoners elected their own Hut Captain; mostly, this was the senior officer in the hut. The military called these officers Hut Foremen and Chief Foreman, but the prisoners always insisted on giving them their ranks of Captain and Commandant. We were not long there until we discovered there were about 800 more prisoners down the road in an old disused distillery, and anyone reporting sick was marched down there each morning to see a doctor. After some short time, everyone was going sick in order to get down to meet the prisoners below, but the doctor got wise to this, and prisoners received a pill after which they had to take a big drink of water. This pill had a very strong after-effect; this reduced the number going sick. Shortly after going to Frongoch, we were served with Internment Order and a

sheet of paper on which we could appeal against Order.

After a meeting of senior officers, it was decided that no one would appeal, and after some short time they brought all prisoners to London before Appeal Commission. We were brought in batches of a hundred, and our escort was a party of Canadian-Scottish troops. The Captain lined us up before leaving the compound and said we could sing or do anything we liked only escape; if anyone attempted to escape, the troops would fire. We sang the whole way to London (by train). When we arrived in Birmingham, the train stopped for about fifteen minutes and we received an amount of cigarettes, sandwiches, oranges, etc. I believe these were supplied us by Irish girls working in that locality. At the same time in Birmingham there was a train of wounded "Tommys" and they did not seem to be as well received as we were. We eventually arrived in Wormwood Scrubbs detention barracks where we were brought before the Commission.

Before going before the Commission, we were brought in singly to a room in which there were two men. No prisoner seemed to know these two men, and they stated they were there to advise us but wanted a statement of our activities first, so that they could advise us. I told them I didn't want their advice and was making no statement, after which they had no more to say to me, only they advised me I was foolish.

I was then brought before the Commission. I think this consisted of Mr. Justice Pim, Justice Sankey and a Mr. Mooney, then an M.P. As far as I could see, they were looking for information as to who were in leading positions in the Rising, how we were mobilised, etc. Of

course, I knew nothing at all about this.

There was another man of the same name from Enniscorthy who was not an active member before the Rising but who was out in Easter Week, and it appeared that they had mixed him up with some of my activities in Enniscorthy. When originally arrested in Ballygarrett, I gave this address and stuck to this address all the time, and the Commission didn't seem to know how a man, fourteen miles away from Enniscorthy, was implicated and I didn't enlighten them. But the other John O'Reilly from Enniscorthy, after coming out, told me about all the things they had against him. But he took it in good part and didn't enlighten them either, only told them he didn't know what they were talking about.

In Wormwood Scrubbs detention barracks were a large number of conscientious objectors to military service. These men were receiving very rough treatment. I saw them, through the cell window, getting kicked around the yard for refusing to drill or don uniform. The warders (old soldiers) said they could not understand this position. We were in for fighting, and the others were in for refusing to fight. These old soldiers (old Boer War men) thought we deserved credit for fighting for our country, rightly or wrongly.

While I was in London, about five days, all the prisoners in the North Camp had been removed to the South Camp, and the North Camp closed. I think there were originally about two thousand prisoners in both camps but, after parties been brought to London, there were members being released every other day. During this time, we were marched down each fine day to a large field away from

the compound. This field was surrounded by barbed wire too, but not as strongly as the compound. Of course, there was a guard outside the wire, about every thirty yards, while we were in the field in the forenoon and afternoon. We went through a very extensive course of military training in this field, and I often thought afterwards that the foundation of the organisation which put up such a good fight afterwards was laid in that field. There were meetings of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in that field, and I know prisoners who were there and, when they were released, they were better trained in morale and body than when they came there.

We often discussed what, if any, system they were working on, with regard to releases, but we could never arrive at any conclusion. There were men in Frongoch who were captured in Dublin in positions where there had been heavy fighting, in officer's uniform, and some of these officers were released when men, who were only active Gaelic Leaguers, were still held.

After all the careful searching of prisoners going into jail, out of jail, and in to Frongoch, I was sleeping beside a Dublin man in Frongoch and he had his commission, one round of ammunition for a Howth rifle and a despatch which had been sent into the G.P.O. from Commandant W.J. Brennan Whitmore, and he was released with me on the 2nd August, 1916, and brought these articles home with him.

I always believed, and still do, that the best men Ireland ever had were in that lot in Frongoch and,

along with the other sentenced men, they formed the nucleus of the fight which was carried on so successfully in after years.

SIGNED:

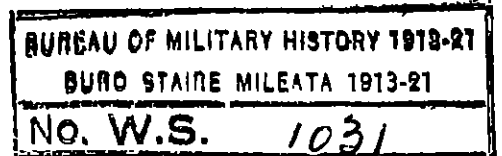
John J. O'Reilly

(John J. O'Reilly)

DATE:

25th Octbr 1954

25th Octbr. 1954.



WITNESS:

Sean Brennan Lieut.-Col.

(Sean Brennan) Lieut.-Col.