

ORIGINAL

W.S. 804

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURU STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 804

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 804

Witness

Mortimer O'Connell,
34 Dartmouth Square,
Ranelagh,
Dublin.

Identity.

Member of Teeling Circle, I.R.B., Dublin, 1913 - ;

Member 'F' Coy. 1st Batt'n. Dublin Brigade,
Irish Volunteers, 1914 -

Clerk to Dail Eireann at date of statement.
Subject.

- (a) Jameson's Distillery, Dublin, Easter Week 1916;
- (b) Biographical notes on some of the Leaders
of the Easter Week Rising, 1916.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

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Statement by Mr. Mortimer O'Connell,
Clerk of the Dáil, Leinster House, Dublin.

Resident at

34, Dartmouth Square, Ranelagh, Dublin.

I was born in Ballinskelligs, Co. Kerry, on the 31st January, 1894. I went to the National School in Ballinskelligs until I reached the age of 14. I then spent three years in St. Coleman's College, Fermoy, and three years in Blackrock College. I then left Blackrock College in 1914 and became a Customs and Excise Officer in October 1914, having been successful in a May 1914 examination.

When home on holidays in Ballinskelligs, Co. Kerry, from Blackrock College I became secretary of the local Volunteer Company in May 1914.

In 1912, while I was a student in Blackrock, I passed the Senior Grade and went to University College, Blackrock, now known as "The Castle", which is within the precincts of Blackrock College. This University College was an extern College of the Royal University up to 1909 or 1910. While there I used visit 44, Mountjoy Street, known as The Munster Hotel, owned by Miss McCarthy who was a relative of mine. Fionán Lynch, Gearóid O'Suilleabháin, Muiris Ó Catháin and Floss O'Doherty, all Volunteers, resided there, and

before Christmas 1913, during one of these visits, I met Seán MacDermott, who swore me into the I.R.B. in the Keating Branch of the Gaelic League at 18, North Frederick Street.

I was then attached to the Teeling Circle, the Centre of which was Bulmer Hobson. The Circle met in the Dublin Typographical Association Offices in Gardiners Street.

After I took up duty in the Customs and Excise on the 5th October, 1914, I went to live at 44, Mountjoy St. and joined "F" Company, 1st Battalion, National Volunteers, Dublin Brigade, of which Company Fionán Lynch was Captain. The other officers were D. O'Hegarty, Frank Shouldice, Liam Archer. A Sergeant in the Company was one Williams, a well-known Volunteer. He was a plumber. Seán S. O'Connor, now solicitor, was also a sergeant in the Company. Gearóid O'Suilleabháin was also a member of the Company, but I think he was, in the main, personally attached to Seán MacDermott.

From that time until 1916 I carried out the normal activities of which there is ample evidence. I did ordinary training to the extent to which it was given. I remember at one period I was told to lie low because of enquiries being made about me at the Custom House by the Police Authorities. After this I didn't take part in any parades because it was feared I should be transferred to England. About this time also Fionán Lynch nominally retired from the

Captaincy because he was warned by the Board of Education. He continued to do the work of Captain but took no part in the parades.

I.R.B.:

It appeared to be the policy at this time to try to get as many men as possible into the I.R.B. and, if possible, to get selected men in all Government Departments to act as keymen and gather information whenever and wherever it was considered of value from the point of view of the entire movement.

Seán MacDermott was a constant visitor at 44, Mountjoy St., and he was also a regular visitor to the Keating Branch in 18, North Frederick St. In this way I became very intimate with him, having many talks with him. As Customs Officer I was free at exceptional periods in the day, say up to 2 p.m. or after 2 p.m., or practically all day if I was on night duty. In this way I acted as a kind of runner and did any and every kind of message possible for Seán MacDermott. Very often I had to call at D'Olier St. where messages were left at the offices of "Irish Freedom". I would collect the message and deliver it wherever required or collect information. In many chats with Seán MacDermott I remember him definitely expressing the view that the Conflict of 1914-1918 could not be allowed to go by without an attempt being made to throw off British rule in Ireland by force of arms.

One of the jobs we did for MacDermott was before Christmas 1914. At this time the British were becoming active in regard to the paper 'Irish Freedom' and it was feared it might be suppressed. Gearóid Ó Súilleabháin told me one Friday that there was a job to be done and that he and I were to call with a trap to Mahon's Printing Works in Yarnhall Street where an edition of 'Irish Freedom' had just been printed. We went there and took in the trap (to whom it belonged, I don't know) ten bundles each containing about 100 copies of 'Irish Freedom'. We arrived in Yarnhall St. around 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon and moved off with our bundles which we brought to North Frederick St. This was the last copy of 'Irish Freedom' which was issued. The following day the All-Ireland Final was being played in Croke Park between Kerry and Wexford, and on the Monday an order was made by Dublin Castle suppressing 'Irish Freedom' and other such papers.

The main purpose of bringing the copies of 'Irish Freedom' to the Keating Branch was to post copies to those whose names were on the mailing list. This I did with many willing helpers. I may say I was very surprised to find amongst the names on the mailing list people from practically all over the world who were subscribers to it, to places, for instance, in Chile, Argentine, Hong Kong, India and, of course, U.S.A.

In December 1915 or in the beginning of 1916 all members of our Circle were told that we could not leave Dublin without permission. This we took to be a hint

that something was brewing. In the second week of January 1916 I became aware that Tim Ring, an I.R.B. member of the Western Union Cable Company in Valentia, had come to Dublin and was staying in 44, Mountjoy St. He had come at the instance of the Supreme Council of the I.R.B., probably arranged by the head of the Circle down there. I brought him to Banba Hall, Parnell Square, or somewhere like that where we met, I think, Sceilg who took him to the Supreme Council.

At the same time Tommy O'Connor, brother of John S. O'Connor, Solicitor, who was a Steward on an American Liner, arrived back in Dublin after one of his trips from New York. He had brought back the latest communications from the Clan na Gael (John Devoy and Co.) and he was making a return trip later.

The purpose of Ring's visit, as I learned from him in Frongoch, was that he received from the I.R.B. instructions to send a telegram on Easter Saturday or Easter Sunday (he was to use his own judgment) addressed to a Mrs. Corcoran in New York. The text of the telegram read something like this - "Ted operated on successfully". It was also to be signed Corcoran. I asked him who the Corcorans were and he told me the telegram was supposed to refer to somebody in Kenmare by the name of Corcoran. Ring's father came from Kenmare. After a day or so he returned to Valentia and waited for Easter Saturday when everything seemed set for the Rising. He had been told

to expect a Rising or had got sufficient hints to conclude that something was pending, and according to instructions he handed in the arranged telegram at the Valentia local post-office on Easter Saturday afternoon. It was sent as a week-end letter cablegram, which meant that it would be delivered in New York on the Monday morning. As events turned out the Rising contemplated for 3 o'clock on Easter Sunday 1916 didn't take place until 12 o'clock on the Monday, which was the New York time at which the telegram was being delivered to the address in New York, where in fact John Devoy and the Clan na Gael were waiting for it (New York time being five hours behind us). John Devoy, in anticipation, apparently had convened a meeting of friendly Press men and had stated that he would have an important pronouncement to make. The Press men duly met him and his pronouncement was that an Insurrection had taken place in Ireland and that a Republic had been proclaimed.

A statement to that effect had been printed in advance and, I believe, it gave an account of the actual positions taken up so far as Dublin was concerned. These prints were put on sale on the streets of New York by selected newsboys. It so happened that opposite the house where this Press meeting took place were the offices of the British Consul in New York. This office would be open day and night because the British were at war. The

Consul or one of his staff heard all the commotion and rushed out to purchase a copy of this paper. He immediately communicated the news to the British Embassy in Washington, who communicated direct by cable with the British Foreign Office in London. Thus the British Authorities in London got the first news of the Rising as far as I have been told, from New York and not from Dublin because we had cut all the cross channel wires in the telegraph office in Amiens St. The reason I am stating this is that the British were frightfully perturbed at the news of the Rising reaching New York so quickly and had failed to get any evidence, despite many efforts on their part, as to how word had reached America. They had treated the incident as a major mystery. The entire Intelligence Service were brought to bear on it, but they failed to get any clue as to how word had gone to America.

In a September 1916 issue, unfortunately, The Gaelic American paper thought fit to do a bit of boasting, and in one of the ordinary paragraphs there appeared something like this - "Despite the vigilance of the British Empire etc. etc. news was sent to America from a remote corner in the Kerry coast informing the Clan na Gael of the Rising etc.". Immediately the British took up the search again and examined all telegrams which went to America from the Kerry coast. They found only one such telegram - the one sent by Tim Ring. One of the highest Intelligence Officers of the British Intelligence Service was in

charge of the search and arrived in Valentia with a Squad and placed Ring under arrest, telling him the story as I have given it in this account and particularly so in so far as the British Consul in New York was concerned. The I.O. told Tim that if they had got a hold of him at that time of the Rising, they would have shot him without trial. When Tim Ring was arrested he was brought finally through Kilmainham to internment in Frongoch, where I met him and learned from him what I have set out above. Tim and I grew up together being from neighbouring parishes.

When the news arrived of our pending release from internment before Christmas 1916, after Lloyd George had come into power, there was reason to believe that Tim Ring would not be released. If this happened a sit-down strike against release was planned unless Tim Ring was also released. However, the necessity did not arise.

In the Camp was a very able British Officer, an Adjutant by the name of Lieutenant Byrnes. He was a Scotsman who had been a Colonel at one time and had got into trouble and had been demoted in 1913 or 1914. So far as my experience of British Army Officers goes he was the ablest I have met. The Camp Commandant was a Colonel F.A. Heygate Lambert, an incompetent of the Yeomanry, who must have had a big pull in military circles to get such an appointment as Camp Commandant, but, of course, there was 'Byrnes' in the background. I learned later in my dealings

with the British that wherever the British had an incompetent man in command of a Camp, whose appointment had been secured by influence rather than by reason of efficiency, they invariably had a very able adjutant in the background, who not alone kept him straight but ran the whole show. In this case Byrnes was such a man, and I believe myself that the release of Tim Ring could be directly attributed to an on-the-spot decision of Lieutenant Byrnes without reference to Headquarters or any other authority.

In any event Tim Ring was released and a year or two afterwards he rejoined the Western Union Cable Co., going to London for a time and then back to Valentia where he died in 1942.

Bulmer Hobson:

My impressions of Bulmer Hobson were garnered from the slight contacts with him which came to me in the way of meetings of the Teeling Circle, of which he was Centre, but what I am going to say would not be altogether founded on that. Hobson was not alone Centre of the Circle; he was also Secretary of the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Volunteer Executive, which was, in effect, the outward show of the I.R.B. Consequently Hobson was in a key-position. All the instructions which went out would go out over his name and in that way he became unusually influential. A friendship existed between Seán MacDermott and Hobson. To MacDermott, Hobson was one of the suffering mass in so far as he was a Northern Protestant with extreme

views, a Republican who apparently was deprived of whatever means of livelihood he had before his views became known. The I.R.B. gave him a means of livelihood. He became a regular contributor to 'Irish Freedom' and I am not clear about other monies put in his way by Clarke and MacDermott but they all did what they could for him. He may also have got a fixed salary, but whatever was the position he was never affluent.

I think that Hobson had an idea that the British would sooner or later make an attempt to enforce conscription in Ireland, which it was anticipated would be enforced in England, or would take action to suppress the Volunteers sooner or later. I can't recollect where I got this idea, but I feel that Hobson was convinced that this was coming and felt that it was on this issue of conscription we should take a stand and fight and that we should not dissipate our strength on anything else. As a matter of fact I am inclined to think I got this from somebody who was talking to Hobson who put this forward as his defence for his views. I would say Hobson was absolutely genuine but he was not a physical force man. He was a Republican and Separatist, but beyond that he didn't quite see where he was going.

Pearse was the editor of An Claidheamh Soluis. He had often said and written that despite all the dedicating of human life to Ireland and other activities being carried on, we were losing what really counted - our language - the spring of nationality which should normally be in anybody. For instance, his sole reason for appearing on the same platform with John Redmond in 1914 at a meeting to boost the Home

Rule Bill was that he was convinced that without unity the language and culture of the nation would be lost, and in this he saw a means of saving the spirit of the nation. If Home Rule came into force we would be in a position to save the language. I can't say if there was any personal clash between Pearse and Hobson. Some people found it very difficult to get on with Pearse. He was a difficult man to understand. I only met him once or twice and I must say I was immensely taken by him.

As a Customs Officer I had a Commission. This is a rather elaborate document and I always carried it with me and if I were held up I pulled it out and showed it. In this way it was very useful.

The week before 1916 Seán MacDermott stayed on different nights in 44, Mountjoy St. At the time it was necessary to sign a register which was in each house. Miss MacCarthy, proprietress, didn't know anything about his staying. When the G. men came along to inspect the register she said she didn't know anything about his having stayed. When we told her MacDermott had stayed she was in a dreadful state. I realised that a situation had arisen which would get the whole house into trouble. I told Gearóid Ó Suilleabháin and Fionán Lynch, and one or other of them got in touch with Seán MacDermott and had him sign the register. So the next time the G. men came his name was there. The house was being watched regularly.

On Easter Saturday night I was guarding Bulmer Hobson who was incarcerated in the house of Martin Conlon in Phibsborough, because it was felt he might be against the Rising and might do something to prevent it. I was relieved about noon on Sunday and was told to remain at 44 Mountjoy St. all day. We got a telegram on Sunday afternoon from Killorglin to the effect that Con Keating was drowned on Friday night. Con, Denis Daly, Sheehan, Monahan and Colm O'Lochlinn had set out to take possession of and operate a wireless plant that was in Cahirciveen.

The original intention in the Rising as I know it was that when we had taken up our positions in Dublin some were to move out into the country and join up with whatever men were advancing from the south. I know the men of Cork were to proceed westwards to meet Kerry Volunteers with the German guns. Exactly what we were to do I don't know, but this plan was completely in abeyance because we didn't get out on the Sunday.

Dr. James Ryan left Dublin on Good Friday night by car to give final instructions from McNeill to the various battalions between Dublin and Cork. I am not sure who went with him, I think it was James McNeill, but in any event he got back to Dublin on the Saturday afternoon and again was sent off by McNeill to the country. He was told he would have to go on the same journey on the Saturday night and countermand the orders previously given. He only arrived in Mitchelstown in time to prevent the men there cutting the lines or taking required action.

He got to Cork city and found that the Volunteers of Cork had moved in accordance with plans towards Macroom and he contacted them somewhere on the Macroom road some distance out of Cork where he cancelled the orders. He got back to Dublin. On Easter Monday, however, couriers were sent out to Cork, Limerick and Tralee but not to Wexford because the Wexford men had come to Dublin for instructions. These couriers reached their respective destinations and delivered their messages, but as far as I know no action was taken.

At the Volunteer Convention in 1917 held at Jones's Road one of the big issues with de Valera in the chair was the trial of McNeill which was being pressed very much by Mick Collins. I took part in the discussion and suggested that if there was to be a trial or courtmartial it should also include the people in charge of Cork, Limerick and Tralee as they had received orders to come out and hadn't turned out. I thought there was no case to courtmartial McNeill, and said I thanked God we had a McNeill and a Pearse. This created a stir and de Valera turned to Collins and said, "Now. You see the road we are going". I don't think I was ever forgiven for having made this suggestion. I am not sure if this aspect of the thing was taken up or not. Also at this meeting some members of the Dublin Brigade complained about the Rising of 1916 because they said men had been brought out not knowing that they were going out to fight.

This was brought up by some prominent members of the Dublin Brigade. They wanted a guarantee from the Executive of the time that a repetition should not occur. It was pointed out to them that we were all soldiers having become a military organisation and that we would have to think of ourselves as such; that such an organisation could not be carried on except under military conditions.

In regard to the disappearance of James Connolly sometime in January, 1916, (probably the first or second week in January) I had nothing to do with it. During the period Connolly was away I had to carry a message to the Distillery in Chapelizod (D.C.E., I think,) to a Customs Officer there by the name of O'Donovan. The message was to be delivered to him and I was told he would know what to do about the message. I presume that it was possible Connolly was in his house in Chapelizod. O'Donovan was married to a first-cousin of Mick Collins and was also a West Cork man. In any event I was told later I had done my work well and that it was in connection with the incarceration of Connolly.

The reason for the incarceration of Connolly was that in the 'Irish Worker' in a January issue, in an editorial, he had stated "these men do not mean business" or something to that effect, and that "he and the Citizen Army would have to act on their own etc." This alarmed the Supreme Council and action was taken immediately. Connolly was arrested and taken to

some house in the Lucan district. There the Easter Week plans were revealed to him. He joined the I.R.B., became a member of the Supreme Council and was given the rank of Comdt. General, being entrusted with a command of the Dublin Brigade. What would have happened if he didn't come round to the I.R.B. point of view is a matter I cannot pronounce on.

The principal men of the I.R.B. Supreme Council and also the Volunteer Executive were men advanced in years. There was E. McNeill, University Professor, Tom MacDonagh, University Professor, and Joe Plunkett who was young but an invalid and incapable of sustained effort. Eamonn Ceannt, a young man of the Dublin Corporation, was, however, a very active capable man but never appeared in the public eye but who was, of course, a great worker behind the scenes. Then there was Pearse who was possibly not a great organiser. Most of the men, except McNeill, were out and out physical force men. Seán MacDermott was also a man who was an invalid. He was a victim of chronic sciatica or arthritis and walked with great pain using a stick, but he was a man of amazing courage and fortitude which enabled him to overcome this terrible disability. He got this apparently fairly young because he had it for some years.

MacDermott was one of the most lovable characters you could meet. He was an extraordinarily able man, and a man of great vision and quality of mind and, of course, a physical force man to the hilt degree.

Joe Plunkett was understood to be the member of the Council who had made a study of military strategy.

In amongst this group of men came Connolly, a man of dynamic and forceful personality and with great method and powers of organisation. Inevitably he became an influential force in the situation and in the preparations from January to April being carried out for 1916.

The ordinary Volunteer knew very little about him at this particular period because he had the Citizen Army as his own pet child as it were. The Citizen Army was a very small body of 40 or 50 men, if it were even that number. The figures for 1916 show, I think, between 800 and 900 actually taking part in the Rising. Out of these numbers less than 50 were Citizen Army men. In that small group there were only three or four men who were men of ability, energy and drive. Seán Connolly and Michael Mallin were two. Connolly was killed in the attack in Dublin Castle. Mallin was, of course, executed.

In the books which have since been written by R.M. Fox on Connolly, or on the Citizen Army with Connolly at their head, there is an attempt to make them the principals in the whole rising. This is certainly not the case. The Rising would have taken place with or without Connolly. The spade work of preparation for the Rising was done by the four Commandants and officers of the Dublin Brigade.

Connolly's Political Outlook:

Previous to 1914 my impressions of Connolly were formed from what I had read of him and heard from him

on the platform. I attended many of the strike meetings of 1911, 1912 and 1913, coming in from Blackrock with other students from The Castle to hear Larkin and Connolly, amongst others, speak. My impression was that he was an extreme international Socialist or what we would now term a Communist. He had attended meetings of the "Second Internationale" which were international meetings of representatives of Labour Parties and Labour Unions of all countries. This "Internationale" was anti-Capitalist and as James Larkin once said its policy and that of the Transport Workers was the "Enthronisation of the Proletariat".

Between January 1916 and Easter Week Connolly gave lectures to selected groups of Volunteers. These lectures were held in the offices of some accountant in Nassau St., whose name I cannot recall. I was on occasion one of the Volunteers sent to stand guard, and I was present at some of these lectures. I remember Frank Fahy, later Ceann Comhairle, and others discuss with Connolly his views of a National Policy and asking him how it happened that he was taking this National stand in view of his past pronouncements. Connolly's explanation was that he got a shock when the Labour Leaders of England, France, Germany, Austria and Russia all had declared in 1914 for their respective countries. In other words they had become national. He felt that he himself should take stock, and he came to the conclusion that his first duty in the crisis was to be an Irishman.

Whatever socialist policy he was going to hold would have to remain in abeyance. He considered his first duty was to his country. I personally believe Connolly in the years 1911/1914 was more of an international Socialist than Irish nationalist in viewpoint.

After 1916 Connolly's writings were challenged by Dean Ryan of Cashel, Co. Tipperary, as being anti-Catholic and un-Christian. Alfred O'Rahilly of Cork University took up the challenge on behalf of Connolly and there followed a tremendous amount of correspondence in the Press for some months. O'Rahilly took the viewpoint that fundamentally Connolly was not anti-Catholic in his views and that whatever fault there was in his writings was due to his upbringing and his lack of education and because of this he used terms or appeared to hold views which were anti-Catholic while in fact it was simply and solely a question of a man entering into a field for which he was not schooled. This correspondence would be well worth reading.

There was not a great deal wrong with Connolly. He had extreme labour views and I am convinced that in the effluxion of time, if he had lived, and was working in a free Ireland, there would be a great many people more extreme nationally than he would be - he would shed some of his social policy views, as it were.

I did not know Tom Clarke sufficiently well to express an opinion about him. He was hard of hearing and one could not carry on a conversation with him.

I knew Tom MacDonagh very well. When I was in Fermoy he taught me French and German. At that time he gave us the impression of being far more extreme than the Irish Party of the day. He appeared to me to be a dreamer and possibly one of the least likely men who would have been a physical force man - but of course events proved otherwise.

I met the O'Rahilly first in Ballinskelligs in 1913 where he was on a holiday with his family. He brought them there to learn Irish. We had just started the Volunteers. I don't know whether he was in the Volunteers at the time but he did come out to us to see us drilling and gave us some lectures on the national position. He gave me the impression of being an extreme nationalist.

Ned Daly I knew fairly well. He was 1st Battalion Commander and was a great character and a born military leader. There was, however, never much exchange of opinion amongst us as Volunteers because we were all of the same opinion, and we were mainly concerned with the tasks allotted to us from day to day as they arose.

One of the things which I remember in one of my talks with Seán MacDermott in October or November 1914 at the office of 'Irish Freedom' in D'Olier St. was his

indignation at the attitude of Jim Larkin towards an order which was served on him by Dublin Castle, to leave Ireland. Else he would be deported from Ireland. Larkin, it may be remembered, went to America at that time. The war was on at the time and I understand that arrangements were made by the British with the Americans to allow him to land. He went and didn't return until 1922 or 1923. We understood at the time that the order served on Larkin was signed by Kitchener and that it was intimated to him that if he disobeyed the order he would probably be shot. In any event the impression of the situation I have now is that Dublin Castle at that period, thought that Larkin was one of the most dangerous men from the point of view of Britain, in Ireland. Larkin was never a physical force man so far as I can remember or understood it, even though he took part in the formation of the Citizen Army. I rather think that Connolly was the force behind that organisation with Countess Markeivicz and a man called White who was the son of an English Officer or General. Larkin undoubtedly was a great mob orator but was not a fighting man. I must pay him this tribute. He was one of those who did more for the Dublin workers than anybody ever did. Workers' conditions in Dublin were possibly the worst in Europe at that time.

Castle Order:

I believe Seán MacDermott, like Mick Collins later, had contacts in Dublin Castle. With whom I do not know.

As to the famous 'Castle Order' referred to at a meeting of the Dublin Corporation in Holy Week I cannot express an opinion. It may have been an invention on our part and intended to throw the British off the scent, but it received a great deal of publicity and served a purpose.

On Easter Sunday morning I was surprised to read in the 'Sunday Independent' that the manoeuvres which were to be carried out over the week-end were cancelled. These manoeuvres, we knew, or felt, were to be the actual Rising, and were to take place at 3 o'clock on Sunday. This cancellation of orders as set out in the paper was a great disappointment to us and at the time I didn't know where we stood. I got back to Martin Conlon's from Mass, where with Micheál Ó Loingsigh, Chief Translator of Dáil staff, I was guarding Hobson, for breakfast. Martin Conlon said to me "Of course, that notice on the paper doesn't absolve us from obeying the orders of the I.R.B." I had my breakfast. Fionán Lynch and Gearóid O'Sullivan later came along with somebody who was to relieve me of the job of guarding Hobson and gave me instructions to return to 44 Mountjoy St. and instructed me to remain there for the day and report anything unusual to the Headquarters of the Keating Branch in North Frederick St. Armed with my Excise Commission, I did this. However, the only exceptional incident was a visit of some detectives to look at the Register of the people who were staying in 44 Mountjoy St., and the arrival of a telegram from Killorglin to the

effect that Con Keating and others were drowned at Killorglin. The telegram was sent by Fionán MacCallum who was one of the head Gaelic League organisers at the time. He knew Keating had been staying with us at 44, Mountjoy St. and sent word there. I delivered the message to the Keating Branch but whoever was there had already been tipped off about it. Other than that nothing exceptional happened that day. I was told I was the only one who would be sleeping at 44 that night. The others went off to unusual addresses. This was sufficient indication to me that something was brewing. I went to work in the D.W.D. Distillery at 6 a.m. on the Monday morning and returned to Mountjoy St. for breakfast at about 9.30. I met Gearóid O'Sullivan on my return, who told me that the Rising was on and that we were going out at 12 o'clock and that I was to mobilise certain people who had stores of ammunition and some guns. I was to bring along cabs so that these things could be moved. I made the contacts but in one case the individual didn't turn out. I was then told to proceed to take down the stuff which we had under the roof over the bathroom in Mountjoy St. This consisted of something like 10-12 Howth rifles, revolvers and ammunition. When I had done this I was told to bring all the stuff down to Blackhall Place, which I did quite openly, laying 4 or five rifles across the handlebars of a bicycle and holding them up by the end. In this way I took them down to Blackhall Place. I made three journeys in all and met several soldiers and policemen

going off to Fairyhouse Races, making for the Broadstone Railway Station. After my third journey I was told that I couldn't go back anymore but was to take up my position in the Company at about 5 or 8 minutes to 12 o'clock. Ned Daly addressed us and said: "Lads, we are going out. The Rising is on and a Republic is going to be proclaimed" or words to that effect. "We, of the 1st Battalion, have to defend or operate in the North West corner of Dublin". At 12 o'clock we proceeded to Mary's Lane. We formed a barricade as best we could with some of Jameson's drays and carts, and took up our positions. In the meantime the Four Courts had been captured by Frank Fahy's Company, (C Company), and except for a few snipers from some particular place nothing exceptional happened. A few military cavalry horses came along. They had unshipped their riders somewhere in either O'Connell St. or on the quays, when fired on. I was sentry for a good part of the day out on the Smithfield area and was on the look-out. Everything seemed to go according to plan and I was sent out to scout around up towards the barracks. I moved around a bit but I had to be very careful as troops were marching. We had a few men on top of Jameson's distillery. Nothing exception^{al} happened until about Thursday. In the meantime very heavy fighting had been going on in North King St. We had during the week to go up and control crowds of people who were going to Monks's bakery which was the only bakery operating in the area. Monks's bakery worked 24 hours a day. Another

incident was when a Dublin Cabby came along to me at the distillery on the Wednesday and told me that his horses were starving. I told him he could take what he wanted from the grain stores; which he proceeded to do. He took a 16 stone sack which he hoisted on to his back and thus burdened he made his way down a rickety stairs and went with his sack down the street. We heard no more about him.

On Thursday we were constantly under fire from the Capel St. area of the Markets. On Friday we had heavy fire all round us. We arrested two men in plain clothes. They were British soldiers who had come down to spy on our positions. They had been sent out for this purpose by the British Authorities. On Friday evening a wedge was driven into our position at North King St. separating us from those who were up in the Richmond Hospital direction. We had barricades across Church St. near Fr. Mathew Hall, which was a headquarters. It was evacuated sometime on Friday night or early on the Saturday morning. Finally things became so bad that the order was given to retreat to the Four Courts. A barricade was held on the corner of Mary's Lane and Church St. which held off the British for a period.

We in Mary's Lane were attacked four times on the Saturday by improvised armoured cars which came down Bow St., stopped when the lane was reached and raked us with machine gun fire. Those of us with Howth rifles returned the fire.

Sometime later Seán O'Connor, who was the Sergeant of the Section of the Company, arrived from the Four Courts. He had crossed roofs to give us an order to retreat on the Four Courts. We did this. We went down Bow St. and turned to the left at Hammond Lane for the Four Courts. Half way down a sentry apparently spied us and three of the file were shot in the feet. We immediately pulled the men who were shot at across to the other side of the street where we were under the eaves of the houses on the side on which the sniper was operating. We had practically to carry one, Paddy MacNestry, in our arms. He had collapsed having been under fire for three or four days in North King St. We carried him to the Four Courts. Incidentally he died about four years later in Cork St. Fever Hospital. The doctor who was attending him told me that he must have gone through a bad time and suffered great shock at some particular time. I understood this very well as on the occasion he was wounded he was a Pioneer and wouldn't take a drink to revive him. At the Four Courts we had a meal and were then told to have a sleep which we did in some one of the rooms of the Four Courts. After some time we woke up to hear somebody saying that we all had to get down to the yard as an order for surrender had come from Pearse. We obeyed. British cordons were placed around the Four Courts and an officer said we had to throw our equipment, rifles etc. in a heap in the courtyard of the Four Courts. We then marched down the quays; turned up to the left into some one of the streets and eventually went down Henry St. to the

Pillar where we were searched by soldiers. They had two baskets or crates into which they threw all sorts of things they found in the search. However, when they found money they put it into their pockets instead of into the baskets. At the head of the Column was Ned Daly, and forming up the rear was ~~P~~ Beasley with the men of the No. 1 Dublin Brigade. When Beasley was being disarmed they tried to take his sword from him but he refused to hand it over. Breaking it on his knee he shouted "Long live the Irish Republic". We were then brought to the plot of ground at the Rotunda where the Post Office garrison who had previously surrendered were lying on the grass. We joined them and lay on the ground where possible. I remember, having dozed off for some time during the night, waking to hear a British Sergeant shout "These are the Bs. who shot our men in North King St." He was a Sergeant of the South Staffordshires. The South Staffordshires had just relieved the British soldiers who were guarding us when we first arrived. It became clear to me that we would be massacred by the South Staffordshires for the slightest provocation. However, fortunately for us, a high-ranking British officer who must have understood the position took it on himself, either to relieve that guard of South Staffordshires, or bring in the Dublin Fusiliers to stand between us and the Staffordshires.

Early on the Sunday morning the notorious Captain Lee Wilson came along. He called out Tom Clarke

and spoke to him very insultingly while searching him. He also called out Seán MacDermott and others whom I cannot recollect. One called out was Mick Collins who was, I think, in uniform. When I saw him being called I felt we were in for it as it was probable in his present mood he would attack the officer. However, he kept his temper. Later we got orders to march to O'Connell St. where the head of the column was at the Pillar. We were there for a good while as a guard was being found from the various posts around to take us to some place, which turned out to be the Richmond. While we waited we saw a big woman of the nocturnal pavement walk down O'Connell St. and outside Gills she took a slug from a bottle she carried and shouted "Up the Bloody Republic". Immediately an officer and soldiers began to run towards her. We expected she would be bayoneted but that did not happen. All the commotion kept me from dozing. I was at the end of the Column and unfortunately near the Sergeant of the South Staffordshires, who continued to be insulting to us. On the way to the Richmond a few of us helped Seán MacDermott whose stick was taken from him. The Sergeant bayoneted one or two men on the way up. Going up High St. we were stormed and pelted with refuse of all types and sorts by what we called the "Separation Women". We arrived at the Richmond, being the first group to arrive there, and were put into a big gymnasium where G. men came along and scrutinised everybody. They picked out those whom they deemed to be the principals

in the Rising. Seán MacDermott, Joe Plunkett and Tom Clarke were naturally picked out. Mick Collins, being unknown at that time, was put on the other side of the line. Eventually we were placed in a room for some hours where we got a tin of bully beef each and biscuits, which we were told that we were not to eat for some hours as we were going on a long journey. We finally went out into the barrack square and were marched to the docks where we were put on board a cattle ship. We were herded in the holds with a soldier standing at each entrance on guard all the time. We lay on the floor and fell asleep. Somebody near me woke up in a terrible panic and was rushing for the door but he tripped and I made a dive for him. He had seen the soldier put on life jackets. We finally arrived at Holyhead and entrained for an unknown destination. In the carriage in which I was there was Mick Collins, Colm Murphy, Dr. James Ryan, Eddie Dore of Limerick, Denis Daly of Cahirciveen and a man called Maher (?) who was a Dublin man. We discussed the whole Rising and wondered where we were going. The general idea was that we were going to be interned. I thought that an attempt might be made to draft us into the British Army. This, we decided, we would not let happen.

Some hours later the train stopped at a station which we didn't know as the blinds were down on the train windows, and a soldier came in and told us we were getting out at this station. Denis Daly looking out said, "My God! This is Stafford. I am well known

here". He had lived and worked in Stafford for seven or eight years as a Post Office Superintendent, was liable to conscription and saw the possibility of himself being forced into the army. Yet none of those who knew him split on him.

From the station we marched to the barracks. On the way we were booed and pelted by men, women and children; mainly women. Outside the barracks we were heavily stoned by a group of young men. An English soldier - Staff-Sergeant Shaw, who was a military policeman - turned on the young Englishmen and said: "You blackguards! These men have fought for their country; it's about time you got into uniform and did something for your country". This Sergeant had been in America and had been a member of the Democratic Party there. There he had met many Irishmen, all separatist in outlook, and he told me that he well understood what our views were and he didn't see why we should not have a Republic if we wished. We were in Stafford Jail for seven weeks, and finally were sent to Frongoch.

Griffith:

Griffith I knew fairly well and admired immensely. He was a man of charm and great moral courage and not by any means the pacifist - no more than MacNeill - he was alleged to be. In the height of the Black and Tan terror in 1919/20/21, as acting head of the Government of Ireland, he gave unstinted approval to all the measures taken to meet the British onslaught. He knew the British mind so well that, rather than remain as we were, he was prepared to meet them at their own game, to fight hard for the maximum, to get the best bargain he could and to bide his time. He had sufficient faith in the people to trust them to continue the advance.

He had a lively sense of humour and readily saw the funny side of things, and liked a creamy pint, usually in The Ship, Abbey St. He once told a young ardent Glasgow-born

Sinn Féin priest, who was pestering him about a social policy, that before formulating such a policy he would be very much heartened if the Ten Commandments were obeyed.

MacDermott and Connolly.

MacDermott was labour-minded and, therefore, closest to Connolly, more than any other Volunteer that I knew. On the occasion of the Manchester Martyrs Anniversary in November 1915, a Volunteer Meeting was held in Parnell Square opposite Charlemont House. MacNeill presided at the meeting. Nearby was a Citizen Army meeting, Connolly being the principal speaker. MacDermott spoke from the Volunteer platform and, later, spoke from the Citizen Army platform. There was no reciprocity on the part of the Irish Volunteers.

MacNeill and Easter Week.

MacNeill was Chairman or President of the Irish Volunteer Executive from October 1914 to Easter Week 1916. During that period the preparations for Easter Week went on, apparently unknown to MacNeill until a week or so before the date fixed for the Rising. When the plans were revealed to him by, I believe, Pearse and MacDonagh and possibly others, he accepted the situation and, until Easter Saturday, was prepared to lead the Rising. As proof, I would refer to my earlier reference in this statement to his sending Dr. James Ryan, T.D. to the country on Good Friday to give final instructions to the Volunteer leaders in Munster. On hearing, however, on Easter Saturday of the capture of the German ship 'Aud', he had to reconsider his decision to lead the Rising, and decided to cancel the order for the Easter Week manoeuvres which, in effect, were to be the Rising. Dr. Ryan was sent out again on Easter Saturday night with orders countermanding those of the previous day. I applaud MacNeill's decision in all the circumstances. It required moral courage of an exceptional degree. The later decision to rise on Easter Monday was taken by those who believed that action could not be longer delayed,

particularly as the British were bound to act in the light of the capture of the 'Aud' and the many evidences that something was brewing. It was essential that Dublin Castle should be forestalled, otherwise we would be all taken without a fight with conscription inevitable. Further, there was the policy that the war should not be allowed to end without an attempt being made to assert Ireland's right to sovereignty by force of arms. I was in complete agreement with this and have had no reason to think it was not the right policy.

Redmond's pledge to Britain.

In 1914, when war seemed inevitable, tension was high in Ireland. The Buckingham Palace Conference on Home Rule had failed, the guns were landed at Howth, and the Scottish Borderers returning to barracks had fired on the citizens of Dublin at Bachelors Walk. The Kaiser and his advisers had come to the conclusion that civil war or insurrection was inevitable in Ireland and that England was divided in that there had been the Curragh Mutiny. Such was the situation when war was looming.

Meantime, towards the end of July the reservists were called up and there were many thousands such reservists in Ireland. At a Nationalist meeting in Derry the reservists pledged themselves not to answer the call until Home Rule was put into force. This was taken up elsewhere in the country, Tralee for instance. Redmond was called upon to demand immediate Home Rule with guarantees of greater powers than were in the Bill nearing enactment or else no reservists would leave Irish shores. Redmond was alarmed at the proposal, but had sufficient influence to induce the reservists to answer the call up. What further happened? Redmond pledged the Volunteers to the defence of the shores of Ireland, the Home Rule Bill was put on the Statute Book, to come into force by 'Order in Council' to be made at a future date - no such Order was ever made. The war having come about, the British War

office under Kitchener ignored Redmond, who then said the place of all Irishmen was in the British army.

I wonder what would have happened if the reservists had remained at home. Would the British Government have acceded to a demand by Redmond for immediate Home Rule? If not, and if Redmond had stood fast, very few British troops would have reached the continent to fight such delaying actions as that of the Munster Fusiliers at Mons, etc., which materially helped to stay the German bid for Paris. Ireland would certainly not have been denuded of trained British troops to be replaced by the rawest of raw recruits. The problem of Kitchener & Co. would have been no easy one to decide - I believe France would have been sacrificed and Britain would have sought to hold on to Ireland. Verily Redmond missed the tide and, unfortunately, there were at the time no alternative leaders with sufficient country-wide support to act. Sinn Féin had not yet captured the imagination and the support of the people. There were few men of action in the Irish Party and those that were were in the British army in France fighting for the 'freedom of small nations in Europe and junkerdom in Ireland' as Tom Kettle put it.

Leading article in 'Independent':

I shall close this statement by recalling a Leading Article in the 'Irish Independent' after the surrender of 1916, when public opinion in the country was becoming outraged at the executions and when British public opinion was becoming alarmed at the reactions in the United States. In the House of Commons there had been a full dress debate, notable for a militant nationalist speech by John Dillon and a sign that the British Government was going to 'trim its sails' and find an excuse to ease off on the executions. At this stage all those who had signed the Proclamation had been executed except MacDermott and Connolly. In view of

the climate of public opinion there seemed a chance that Dublin Castle would stay its hand and MacDermott and Connolly spared execution. Such were the hopes of right thinking Irishmen. Lo and behold! there then appeared in a leading article in the "Irish Independent" a demand for the execution of MacDermott and Connolly. Connolly was hated by William Martin Murphy, proprietor of the "Independent". Murphy had founded the Federation of Employers in 1912 or 1913 to fight the Irish Transport Workers' Union in their demand for human conditions of work for Dublin's workers. The article in the "Independent" was what Dublin Castle and General Maxwell, who had become military dictator under martial law, required to continue their fell work. MacDermott and Connolly were executed. Connolly, whose wounds had become gangrenous, had in any case but a short time to live and had to be executed sitting in a chair.

I have often wondered how such a leader came to be printed in the "Independent". Was there a prompt from someone in Dublin Castle, or was it simply Murphy's own decision governed by his hatred of Connolly and the Irish Transport Workers? Did Murphy write it himself, or was it a barrister leader-writer who was responsible for its actual wording, interpreting the mind of Murphy? How did it happen that there were lino men to set up the type without protest? It must be remembered that in the Dublin Typographical Society there were more members of the I.R.B. than in any other body, or, if not in the I.R.B., men who could nevertheless be described as advanced Nationalists.

One of the papers which first circulated in Stafford Jail after our incarceration there was the particular issue of the "Independent" carrying this infamous and dastardly article. It was nauseating to read and galling to hear the comments of some of the military police. I recall this episode as it is well it should not be forgotten.

To close, may I comment - how often have we heard preached "Freedom of the Press is a bulwark of liberty" and then to think that an Irish paper should fall so low and anticipate the press of totalitarian countries where respect for life was hardly as low.

Signed: Mortimer O'Connell
(Mortimer O'Connell)
Date: 16th February, 1953.
16th February, 1953.

Witness: M. F. Ryan Comdt.
(M.F. Ryan) Comd't.

