

JAMES CONLEY examined. (No. 7.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your name?—James Conley.
2. What are you?—Sergeant-major.
3. *Hon. Mr. Allen.*] I want you to tell us about the regulations that were issued—the first lot: do you remember them?—Yes, sir, I know the regulations.
4. Were they posted up?—Yes, in the barrack-room.
5. Were they torn down?—Yes, torn up into pieces.
6. Many times?—Well, sir, I replaced them eight or ten times.
7. And did all these young fellows know about these regulations?—Yes, they had them read to them and explained to them.
8. Tell us, now, what is your impression of these young fellows?—Well, sir, we have had so many different kinds of men. The men from Christchurch we look upon as the difficult men to deal with—they are the organized lot. They will do nothing. We asked them to drill and they absolutely refused; we asked them to drill twice a day. We explained that we wanted to give them physical drill and semaphore signalling. The first day they did signalling only, but afterwards we got a man named Williams who absolutely opposed everything; they got together and Williams stopped everything. Up to the time Williams arrived we got on fairly well, but when Williams came he at once started the discontent. Then another lot of men we got from the West Coast—they failed to attend drill. These men are willing to do any kind of work, but they will not touch a gun.
9. Have they got consciences?—Well, some of them claim to have consciences—to have conscientious objections to military training in one breath, and with the next breath they tell you that they have had three years' service in the Volunteers.
10. There are two classes?—These men are all right if we can keep them away from the Christchurch men, but unfortunately we cannot do that.
11. Have these men been treated well in barracks?—I think they have been treated too well.
12. Have they treated you well?—No. My instructions were to treat them as men, as soldiers in detention, and we have endeavoured to do that all along; but in some cases we found them like wild animals.
13. Used insulting language?—Only on one occasion at me. The language amongst themselves when they were in the barrack-room (we had ten or twelve men there)—I would not care to repeat the language they used there amongst themselves.
14. And these were the conscientious objectors?—Yes. The language got so bad that I was ordered by the officer to get the windows whitened. Every time he came across they used to make remarks, and also when the police came with the prisoners they threw all sorts of remarks at the sergeant.
15. So the windows were whitened to prevent them doing that?—Yes, sir.
16. *Hon. Mr. Anstey.*] You say that you did not seem to have much trouble until Williams came?—Williams was the principal agitator.
17. He seemed to have an organization?—They looked to him for instructions.
18. Did it ever strike you it would be a good idea to make Williams an officer—he seemed to have better control than you?—Just after Williams came we finished all our work. We asked them to do other work, and they absolutely refused; they were in the yard at exercise at the time, and while at exercise we tried to keep them in line. Williams sang out, "Will we work?" and the remainder answered "No." A little while afterwards a ton of coal came for them. I ordered them to carry it, and they absolutely refused. I went down to them and explained quietly to each man that it was for cooking his food. I also pointed out that if they refused I would have to report it to the officer, and they said they did not care. A little while later there was a hunger strike. Each day we took them food and talked to them; they said they did not want that food. They said, "For goodness' sake take it away, the smell is driving us mad." In that case Williams was the first man to give in. Williams asked me if I would take a message to the other men. He asked first if I would grant them permission to hold a meeting, and I said No.
19. *The Chairman.*] Williams was alone then?—Yes; the cell that Williams was confined in was the room occupied by Colonel Cooper during camp, and the other cell was the room occupied by the doctor, and the rooms that they called cells were the non-commissioned officers' rooms. Well, Williams asked me to take the message to the other men, saying that he was willing to give in if they would. I did not take the message, but Williams sang out to them, "We will chuck it up." As soon as Williams gave in the remainder were glad to.
20. *Hon. Mr. Callan.*] How did you come to give Williams the best room?—It was no matter of choice.
21. You were not trying to screen the agitator?—No.
22. *The Chairman.*] Did you see the amount of short rations they were given?—What they termed short rations—well, it was certainly cut down a little. When the men came there first we set them down to a table and they had as much food as they could eat. I was walking round one day and I found a pound of butter. I asked how this was, and they said, "We had too much." I also found four loaves of bread in various states of decay. I told them about that, and I had the cupboards washed and cleaned. I said to them, "Anything you have over, take it back to the cook"; and they all laughed, and the next thing I saw was they were making a football of the bread. I told the officer I thought they had too much, and he asked me what I could do, and I suggested reducing the quantity. Some of the men made themselves sick eating too much without much exercise.
23. Do you think the men had plenty when on short rations—no starvation?—No, not at all.