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Constructing a Narrative of Irish Republicanism 1913 - 1921

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Constructing a Narrative of Irish Republicanism, 1913-1921.

By
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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for
Honors in the Department of History

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ABSTRACT

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Constructing a Narrative of Irish Republicanism,
1913-1921.

The Easter Rising of 1916 and subsequent Anglo-Irish War were two seminal events in contemporary Irish history, and are especially pertinent as the 100th anniversary of the Rising approaches this year. In this thesis, I examine the underlying causes of the Easter Rising, specifically the growing influence of the Irish Republican Brotherhood and an increase in Irish Nationalism. I then trace the planning, preparation, and execution of the Easter Rising, which was not a popular uprising, but rather an armed insurrection led by a small group of militarized radicals. I also analyze the political, social, and economic consequences of the failed Rising, which inevitably led to a continuation of hostilities during the Anglo-Irish War, one of the earliest recorded instances of urban and rural guerrilla warfare. Finally, I examine the tactics used by the Irish Republican Army during the Anglo-Irish War, which enabled them to best a better trained, better equipped, and professional military force through the use of highly refined guerrilla tactics and the growing support of the Irish population.

This study utilizes numerous oral histories collected by the Irish Bureau of Military History, published memoirs of notable figures from the Republican movement, archived newspaper articles, and other historical publications to construct a narrative of the events as seen through the eyes of the participants. Careful analysis of this narrative deconstructs the chain of

events, and seeks to further explain how such wanton acts of violence occurred in a Western, modern, and industrialized state.

The results of the Anglo-Irish War continue to have direct political effects today, as some small terrorist groups in Northern Ireland continue to claim lineage from, or at least the namesake of, the group founded by Irish Nationalists in 1913 and reorganized by the Dáil Eireann in 1919. An understanding of the historical context behind this group is necessary to fully grasp the contemporary political situation, and explain the bulk of 20th Century Irish history, especially “The Troubles” of Northern Ireland.

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Introduction

“We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish People.”¹ These words, written by Patrick Henry Pearse, announced the proclamation of a new Irish Republic, which Pearse and his followers would die to defend. Although the Irish had revolted against English rule many times in the past, there was something distinctly different about the Easter Rising of 1916 and subsequent Anglo-Irish War. Suddenly, Irishmen from all walks of life were eager to question the legitimacy of British rule, and many were willing to take up arms in order to fight for the Republic proclaimed by Pearse. The notion of the Irish Republic soon became sacred to those who believed in it, and many became prepared to give up their lives, as Pearse had, in order to defend their idealized Republic.

The Easter Rising and Anglo-Irish War were two seminal events in contemporary Irish history, and are especially pertinent as the 100th anniversary of the Rising approaches this year. In this thesis, I examine the underlying causes of the Easter Rising, specifically the growing influence of the Irish Republican Brotherhood and rise of Irish nationalism, which drastically increased around the turn of the 20th century. I then trace the planning, preparation, and execution of the Easter Rising, and analyze the political, social, and economic consequences of its failure – which inevitably led to a continuation of hostilities during the Anglo-Irish War. The Anglo-Irish War proved to be an intense and bloody struggle, and was one of the earliest

¹ Patrick Henry Pearse, *Letters from PH Pearse*. ed Séamas Ó Buachalla. (Colin Smythe: Gerrards Cross, 1980) p. 366.

recorded instances of urban guerrilla warfare. Men were not simply killed on the battlefield, but were gunned down while walking through the streets of Dublin or sleeping in their own beds.

This study utilizes numerous oral histories collected by the Irish Bureau of Military History, which was staffed by Irish Army officers and civil servants who interviewed many members the aging revolutionary generation from 1947 to 1957. The bureau also collected letters, documents, and witness statements written and submitted by participants in national activities in order to chronical the events of the Republican movement which occurred between 1913 and 1921.² Other primary sources examined in this thesis include the published memoirs of notable figures such as Desmond Fitzgerald and Michael Brennan, archived British and Irish newspaper articles, and other historical publications such as Bulmer Hobson's *History of the Irish Volunteers Vol. 1*. These various primary sources all help to construct a narrative of the events as seen through the eyes of the participants, and discuss events such as meetings, battles, or imprisonments, which otherwise would have gone unrecorded in official documents.

Many scholarly works have been written about both the Easter Rising and the Anglo-Irish War. Charles Townshend's *Easter 1916* (2006) provides a careful examination of events, and utilizes many British government documents to artfully paint a well-rounded picture of the conflict from both Irish and British perspectives. Townshend also provides a detailed narrative of the Rising itself, outlining exactly what occurred where, and when, during Easter Week of 1916. Edgar Holt's *Protest in Arms* (1961) constructs a chain of events that took place from the formation of the Irish Volunteers through the Irish Civil War, and provides valuable background information on the conflict, as well a detailed account of many famous occurrences. Other

² Irish Bureau of Military History, "Guide to the Bureau of Military History," last modified 2016. <http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/about.html>

notable works include Hart's *The IRA and Its Enemies* (1998) and *The IRA at War* (2003), Townshend's *The British Campaign in Ireland* (1975), and F.X. Martin's edited and annotated collection of documents, *The Irish Volunteers: Recollections & Documents* (1963).³

1. A Nation Once Again

Historical Rebellions

³ F.X. Martin's work has been republished in 2013 for its 50th anniversary, and it is that version which is cited in this paper.

Since the English first arrived in Ireland during the 12th century, there has been a long history of resistance and insurrection against the British forces. Animosity between the Irish and English increased when Henry VIII split from the Catholic Church, since the great majority of the Irish refused to abandon Catholicism, and many Englishmen began to fear they might collaborate with England's Catholic enemies, such as France and Spain.⁴ The situation was exacerbated by a series of hostilities, including the Tyrone Rebellion led by Hugh O'Neill at the end of the 16th Century, as well as a minor rebellion led by Cahir O'Doherty in 1608.⁵ In response, the English Parliament enacted the Articles of Plantation in 1609, which enabled the Crown to seize land from those who participated in the previous rebellions, and then distribute those lands to Protestant English settlers who were willing to colonize Ulster and establish an English stronghold in Northern Ireland (which in effect, still exists today).⁶ The establishment of a Protestant colony in Ulster sowed the seeds for a conflict between Protestant and Catholic Irishmen that has been ongoing for centuries.

After the arrival of the English settlers there were further rebellions in 1641, 1798, 1848, and 1867. By 1798 many Irish had been influenced by the ideals of the American and French revolutions, and over time there was an increase in Irish nationalism and desire for autonomy from the British Empire.⁷ Although every rebellion eventually failed, the rebellion of 1867 proved to have lasting consequences which would shape the Irish Republican movement in the early 20th century. The 1867 uprising was led by members of the Fenian Brotherhood, which was

⁴ Bruce Nelson, *Irish Nationalism and the Making of the Irish Race*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) p. 19

⁵ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "Ireland", accessed February 12, 2016. <http://www.britannica.com/place/Ireland/The-Shane-ONeill-rebellion>. And Mike Cronin, *A History of Ireland*. (New York: Palgrave, 2001) p.64.

⁶ Cronin. p. 65.

⁷ Nelson. p. 24.

established by John O'Mahoney and James Stephens,⁸ and led by some survivors of the Young Ireland Movement – the organization responsible for the 1848 rebellion.⁹ The Fenian Brotherhood grew steadily throughout the 1860's, and both O'Mahoney and Stephens traveled abroad to rally support for the organization and collect financial contributions from Irish emigres, especially in New York where O'Mahoney was quite successful in garnering aid. The Fenians looked back at the failed rebellions of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, and decided their only chance for success was to stage an armed insurrection across the entire country.¹⁰

One of the failures of the 1848 rebellion was the lack of support the rebels had among the general population. However, the Irish people were still devastated by the Great Famine, which had killed roughly 1/8th of the population and forced countless others to emigrate.¹¹ Without the basic ability to put food on the table many simply did not have the time or energy to get involved with political affairs. In an attempt to garner popular support for their uprising, the Fenians began publishing periodicals and pamphlets, including *The Irish People*, which was first published in 1861. Furthermore, many members of the Fenian Brotherhood traveled to the United States and fought in the Irish Brigade during the U.S. Civil War, which gave them crucial military training and experience that they planned on using upon their return to Ireland. Some Fenians even launched an invasion into Canada in 1866, with the hopes their raids against a British territory would bring the British Government to the negotiating table.¹² Finally, on March

⁸ Cronin p. 150.

⁹ Charles Townshend, *Easter 1916*. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006) p. 3.

¹⁰ Cronin p. 150.

¹¹ Cronin p. 147.

¹² "The Fenian Raid and Battle of Ridgeway June 1-3, 1866." Last modified 1 June 2014. <http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~dbertuca/155/FenianRaid.html>

5, 1867, the Fenians began their rebellion by attacking police barracks, derailing trains, and sabotaging telegraph lines across the country.¹³

The Fenian uprising of 1867, like all the uprisings that preceded it, failed to break the British hold on Ireland. The Fenians failed to acquire adequate arms and ammunition, were easily infiltrated by British agents, and as much as they tried failed to get enough popular support from the Irish people. By the end of the year the Fenians were defeated and the rebellion was put down.¹⁴ However, the secret society of Fenian Brotherhood was not completely destroyed, and continued on as the Irish Republican Brotherhood, or I.R.B. (although even during the 20th century many still referred to members of the I.R.B. as “Fenians”). The I.R.B. became an important organization for Irish nationalists, and was always quietly pushing for open rebellion against the British, in contrast to other nationalists who preferred fighting for independence (or at least autonomy) within the British parliamentary system.¹⁵ Many leading Irish nationalists belonged to the Brotherhood, and in the years before the Rising there was a systematic attempt to get members of the I.R.B. appointed as leading members of the varying nationalist and republican movements. The legend of the Fenian uprising in '67 also became an important rallying cry for nationalists in the 20th century, and along with the other major rebellions, became a source of inspiration for many members of the Irish Volunteers.

Growth of the I.R.B.

¹³ Cronin. pp. 151-152.

¹⁴ Cronin. p. 152.

¹⁵ Townshend, *Easter 1916*. p. 4.

Although the Irish Republican Brotherhood had existed since 1858, in the years after the Fenian uprising of 1867 it became less active until the turn of the 20th century. The Brotherhood was organized in Circles, which were tightly knit groups of people sworn to secrecy and established in cities or towns. Each Circle had a Center, who was in charge of leading the Circle and communicating with the I.R.B. Supreme Council. Ernest Blythe, a member of both the I.R.B. and Irish Volunteers, met with members of the old Fenian movement in Ulster after he got involved in a more active I.R.B circle in the early 1900's. Blythe wrote:

I formed a rather poor opinion of the remains of the I.R.B. There were only one or two senior members in the neighborhood, and, while they were very good fellows, I saw that all they were doing was maintaining a tradition and that it would never be possible to get them to make much of a public move. [...] The only thing that the I.R.B. did there was keep alive a feeling of dislike and distrust of the Hibernians¹⁶ and of the Parliamentary movement, and cause a few young people to read "Sinn Fein" or "Irish Freedom."¹⁷

However, as more Nationalist organizations were formed, such as the Gaelic Athletic Association (G.A.A.) or Gaelic League (established in 1884 and 1893, respectively), the I.R.B. began to grow again. Not all I.R.B. Circles suffered the same decline as the Ulster Circle Blythe described, and sincere efforts to reform the organization by eliminating drunkards and recruiting younger members were undertaken.¹⁸ Blythe admitted that when he was recruited into the I.R.B. in 1907 "the main activity [of the I.R.B.] was simply recruiting," and in the first decade of the 20th century many new enthusiastic members were sworn in to the I.R.B.¹⁹

The I.R.B. was a secret society, and therefore potential members had to be invited to join, unlike other republican movements that were largely open to anyone. One member of the Belfast

¹⁶ The Hibernians were an Irish Catholic order associated with the Irish Parliamentary Party, which opposed the Fenian desire to wage open rebellion against the British.

¹⁷ BMH WS 939 (Ernest Blythe) p. 17.

¹⁸ BMH WS 914 (Denis McCullough) p. 2.

¹⁹ BMH WS 939 (Ernest Blythe) p. 3.

Circle wrote that, “the selection of new recruits was a subject of extreme care,” and that potential members were carefully watched and evaluated by current members of the Circle before being invited to join.²⁰ Typically, an I.R.B. Circle was affiliated with a social club or nationalist organization, which was used to attract potential recruits. In his witness statement Blythe recounts that he felt a strong desire to learn Irish, so he joined the Gaelic League and later an affiliated hurling club. Through these organizations Blythe made a friend, who informed him “that the Fenian organization was still alive and was again recruiting young men,” and that “their policy was to prepare to make open war on England.”²¹ However, Blythe’s friend approached him prematurely (without consulting other members of his Circle) and therefore needed to get permission from his superiors within the I.R.B. to formally swear Blythe into the Circle.

Blythe’s case was quite common, as the I.R.B. used the Gaelic League, Gaelic Athletic Association, and the *Fianna Éireann* (the Irish Boy Scout organization) to recruit young men. The *Fianna* especially became a hotbed of recruiting for both the I.R.B. and Irish Volunteers, and became so closely associated with the Volunteer movement that one Irish Volunteer wrote he “graduated from the *Fianna* to the Volunteers.”²² Michael Brennan, a former member of the *Fianna*, stated that “The *Fianna* were closely associated with the Wolfe Tone Club, which I later discovered was only a cover for an I.R.B. Circle.”²³ In some circumstances, members of the I.R.B. even accompanied those in the *Fianna* on training exercises or marches. Brennan’s brother was already a member of the I.R.B. while he was in the *Fianna*, and was given special permission to join the I.R.B. at 15 (most sworn into the I.R.B. were typically a few years older – 17 or 18), however this was an exception to the norm. In the *Fianna*, young boys were taught

²⁰ BMH WS 223 (Robert Haskin) p. 2.

²¹ BMH WS 939 (Ernest Blythe) pp. 1-2.

²² BMH WS 461 (Joseph Byrne) p. 1.

²³ Michael Brennan, *The War in Clare*. (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1980) p. 7.

things such as “first aid, musketry, [and] scouting,” as well as introductory lessons in the Irish Language.²⁴ These skills were put to use by both the I.R.B. and the Irish Volunteers, especially during the Easter Rising of 1916 and the Anglo-Irish War that occurred from 1919 to 1921. During both of these conflicts the Fianna took an active role in aiding the Irish Volunteers, and did much more than train potential recruits.

In essence, the I.R.B. operated as a sort of shadow organization, controlling or influencing various nationalist organizations, with the eventual goal of staging an armed rebellion against the British. The Chairman of the I.R.B. Supreme Council during the Easter Rising, Denis McCullough, admitted that:

The I.R.B. worked through Sinn Féin, the Gaelic League, the G.A.A. and eventually through the Irish Volunteers, having key-men in each of them, to influence their policy in the direction required.²⁵

The goal for the I.R.B. was, and always had been, armed rebellion, and by utilizing these various nationalist organizations, they would soon have what they desired.

The Specter of Home Rule and the Ulster Volunteer Force

After the numerous Irish rebellions, the British Parliament contemplated granting Ireland limited autonomy within the United Kingdom and establishing an Irish Parliament in Dublin. However, this idea was always intensely contested in England, and two Home Rule bills were voted down by the British Parliament in 1886 and 1893.²⁶ In 1910 the British Prime Minister,

²⁴ BMH WS 191 (Joseph Reynolds) p. 1.

²⁵ BMH WS 914 (Denis McCullough) p. 4.

²⁶ Townshend, *Easter 1916*. p. 29.

Herbert Henry Asquith, announced that a new, third, Home Rule Bill was in the works. Many British conservatives, especially members of the House of Lords and Tory Party, were fiercely opposed to granting any sort of autonomy to Ireland. Within Ireland, many Protestant loyalists, especially those living in Ulster (who were largely the decedents of the English settlers who were sent to colonize Ulster in 1609), were terrified by the idea of Home Rule, fearing it would make them vulnerable to discrimination from Irish Catholics. In January of 1912, the Ulster Unionist Council met and openly declared its position against Home Rule. The Council reported:

It is not a request for a distinctive Ulster Parliament. It is simply a demand, made in the interests of our fellow-Unionists in all parts of Ireland, as well as of our own, that our Northern province shall continue to possess the exact constitutional privileges and rights which, in common with her British fellow-citizens, she enjoys today as an integral part of the United Kingdom, and that she shall continue to be represented on equal terms with Great Britain in the Imperial Parliament.²⁷

In response, Sir Edward Carson, the leader of the Irish Unionist Parliamentary Party, formed a paramilitary organization called the Ulster Volunteer Force 1912.

Bulmer Hobson, a leading member in the I.R.B. and founding member of the Irish Volunteers, argued that the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force was the most significant catalyst for the formation of the Irish Volunteers. Hobson wrote:

If we must find a founder for every movement, I should say that Sir Edward Carson has strong claims to be considered the founder of the Irish Volunteers, for they were the logical and necessary outcome of the Volunteer movement organized in Ulster the year before.²⁸

Hobson, along with other prominent Irish Republican leaders, viewed the Ulster Volunteers not as a group of people organizing to protect their own rights, but rather a tool of English

²⁷ "ULSTER AND THE UNION." *The Irish Times (1874-1920)*: 4. Jan 04 1912. *ProQuest*. Web. 15 Feb. 2016.

²⁸ Bulmer Hobson, *A Short History of the Irish Volunteers*. (Dublin: The Candle Press, 1918) p. 16.

“Imperialists” used to derail the Home Rule Bill in Parliament.²⁹ Carson and the Ulster Volunteers threatened rebellion if County Ulster was included in the Home Rule Bill, prompting many within the English government to push for the exclusion of Ulster from Home Rule.³⁰ However, the potential exclusion of Ulster enraged many Irish nationalists who wanted to avoid any partition of the country. Furthermore, men like Hobson viewed the training and arming of the Ulster Volunteers as a direct threat to the physical safety of the Irish outside Ulster. In his book, *History of the Irish Volunteers Vol. 1*, Hobson claimed that “men were openly recruited in England, Scotland, and the English Colonies for the purpose of levying a war on the Nationals of Ireland.”³¹ Although Hobson’s book was published in 1918 after the failed Easter Rising, and was likely written at least in part as propaganda to inspire Irish Republicans to continue to the fight against the British, it is undeniable that the British Government turned a blind eye to many activities of the Ulster Volunteers that were not entirely legal, and essentially allowed the Ulster Volunteers to arm. However, many Unionists (those who supported loyalty to the British Parliament and argued against Home Rule) genuinely felt that Home Rule would be an injustice to Ulster, which had demographics unlike any other county in Ireland, and did largely wish to remain integrated into the United Kingdom.³²

While Parliament was debating the Home Rule bill, there were massive demonstrations by Unionists in Northern Ireland. The *Weekly Irish Times* reported that on January 13, 1912 nearly 20,000 men gathered in Omagh to “reiterate and reaffirm the declaration of the Great

²⁹ Hobson p. 11.

³⁰ Hobson p. 2.

³¹ Hobson p. 10.

³² A.V. Dicey, “Facts for Unionists” *Times* [London, England] 8 April. 1913: 6. *The Times Digital Archive*. Web. 5 Feb. 2016.

Ulster Convention of 1893, ‘We will not have Home Rule.’”³³ The Ulster Volunteers would frequently parade, demonstrate, and drill as a show of force in the community, just as the Irish Volunteers would do later. A typical slogan of the Ulster Volunteers was, “Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right.”³⁴ The Protestant community was largely supportive of their demonstrations, and even kids could sometimes be heard shouting “no to Home Rule and to hell with the Pope.”³⁵

Elizabeth Bloxham, an active member of the *Cumann na mBan* and Irish Nationalist, was a Protestant who grew up in Ulster. Bloxham described that her family was never especially political, but wrote that “being Protestants, we were, as a matter of course, Unionists.”³⁶ Bloxham believed that in Ulster religion and politics were inherently intertwined, and knew that many of her former friends and acquaintances judged her harshly when they found out she had become a nationalist, writing “of course, the Protestant community would deplore my defection from the Unionism which was so closely linked with our religion.”³⁷ Bloxham even described that in her Protestant Church, “the Preacher asserted that his political opponents were actuated solely by a desire to crush the Protestant religion and to take from the Protestants their way of living.”³⁸ Of course, not all Protestants were Unionists, and Bloxham discussed that some people (who also happened to be Ulster Protestants) would quietly approach her to voice their support for her speaking out in favor of the nationalist cause. Other prominent Nationalists, like Ernest Blythe, were also Protestants, and in general it seems that Nationalist and Republican organizations were eager accept Protestants into their ranks, so long as their political views coincided with their own. However, sectarian animosity was also present outside of Ulster, and

³³ "UNIONIST CAMPAIGN IN ULSTER." *Weekly Irish Times (1876-1920)*: 5. Jan 13 1912. *ProQuest*. Web. 15 Feb. 2016 .

³⁴ BMH WS 632 (Elizabeth Bloxham) p. 23.

³⁵ BMH WS 632 (Elizabeth Bloxham) p. 15.

³⁶ BMH WS 632 (Elizabeth Bloxham) p. 1.

³⁷ BMH WS 632 (Elizabeth Bloxham) p. 5.

³⁸ BMH WS 632 (Elizabeth Bloxham) p. 13.

even Blythe admitted that he was initially reluctant to join the Gaelic League because he felt he would be expelled from the league if other members learned of his Protestant heritage.³⁹ Clearly, despite the romanticized notion that Catholics and Protestants worked together within the early nationalist movement, religion created a social barrier for many people.

Establishment of the Irish Volunteers

The Irish Nationalists response to the threat of the Ulster Volunteers was to establish their own paramilitary organization. In July of 1913 Hobson attended a meeting with other leading Nationalists to discuss the formation of the Volunteers, but decided to wait a few months before taking any action, in the hopes that the Ulster Volunteers might receive more negative press throughout the country and the bulk of the Irish people would become more susceptible to the idea of a nationalist volunteer organization.⁴⁰ Several months later, in late October, the first meeting of the Provisional Committee for the Irish Volunteers was held at Wynn's Hotel in Dublin. Eoin MacNeill, a well-known professor, intellectual, and Irish nationalist, was approached by Hobson and Michael Joseph O'Rahilly (posthumously referred to by many as "The" O'Rahilly), and brought on to act as chair of the committee. Those present at the first meeting included MacNeill, O'Rahilly, John Fitzgibbon, Sean MacDermott (frequently spelled in Irish as Mac Diarmada), Eamonn Kent, Peirce Beasley, Seumas O'Connor, Robert Page, P.H. Pearse, and several others who would end up leaving the committee.⁴¹

³⁹ BMH WS 939 (Ernest Blythe) p. 1.

⁴⁰ Hobson. p. 17.

⁴¹ Hobson. p. 17.

One of the first desires of those present at the committee meeting was to include other nationalist groups in their plans to form a Volunteer organization,⁴² since other nationalist organizations such as the Hibernians and those affiliated with the Irish Parliamentary Party were not initially supportive of the Provisional Committee's goals. The nationalist (or Republican) movement was quite disjointed in contrast to the Unionist movement, which was relatively cohesive under the guidance of Carson and the Ulster Volunteers. Although organizations like the G.A.A., Gaelic League, Sinn Fein (one of the nationalist political parties), the Irish Volunteers, and the I.R.B. were generally connected together through men who had overlapping membership in several multiple organizations, they were not officially affiliated with one another. John Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary had vastly different ideas and approaches than the other nationalist organizations. Desmond Fitzgerald, an organizer for the Irish Volunteers and fervent anti-Redmondite, wrote that "on the whole we rather hoped and expected that the Home Rule Bill would become law, but we looked upon the Irish Party as enemies."⁴³ Later, in 1914, figures from other nationalist organizations were invited to join the Provisional Committee of the Irish Volunteers, but Hobson wrote that only a third were Redmond supporters and less than half had ever been affiliated with Sinn Fein. Like the Hibernians, Redmond and his supporters were determined to gain Home Rule or some form of Irish autonomy through the established political process, and fiercely opposed any notion of an armed rebellion against the British. Although many followers of Redmond were nationalists, they also felt pride in being a part of the British Empire and United Kingdom, and wanted autonomy without complete separation.

⁴² Hobson. p. 18.

⁴³ Desmond Fitzgerald, *Memoirs of Desmond FitzGerald*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968) p. 33.

Another initial undertaking of the Provisional Committee was to publish a Manifesto of the Irish Volunteers. The Manifesto attempted to declare the righteous nature of the Irish Volunteers, and stated that “the object proposed for the Irish Volunteers is to secure and maintain the rights and liberties common to all the people of Ireland.”⁴⁴ The manifesto also stressed that any member of Irish society could take part in the movement, regardless of age, sex, religion, or socioeconomic status, and it made clear that even those unfit for military service could aid the Volunteers in other ways (such as by donating for the purchase of arms, supporting their rallies, preparing food and equipment, etc.). Rather than appeal to a sectarian divide between Protestants and Catholics, men were called upon to support the movement “in the name of National Unity, of National Dignity, [and] of National and Individual Liberty.”⁴⁵ However, as much as the Provisional Committee attempted to downplay any sectarian aspect of the conflict, religion still weighed heavy on people’s minds. Just as Bloxham described how Protestant nationalists were scorned, many Catholics felt they could not openly support the Unionists. In one letter to the editor published in the *Irish Times*, the author wrote that “if a Roman Catholic fights on the side of the Union he is looked upon as a sort of traitor by one side, and a suspect by the other.”⁴⁶

The Manifesto of the Irish Volunteers was announced and distributed during a public meeting at the Rotunda Rink in Dublin, on November 25, 1913. Hobson reported that around 15,000 people were in attendance, and that 4,000 enlisted in the Volunteers after the speech presentation of the Manifesto by MacNeill.⁴⁷ However, the *Irish Times* reported that only 4,000 people in total attended the event, although it was reported that MacNeill’s speech was given much applause by those in attendance, and the Volunteers were received well. Regardless of the

⁴⁴ “Manifesto of the Irish Volunteers” in *The Irish Volunteers: Recollections & Documents*. ed. F.X. Martin (Sallins, Ireland: Merrion, 2013) p. 105.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ D, D. "LETTERS TO THE EDITOR." *The Irish Times (1874-1920)*: 6. Jan 30 1912.*ProQuest*. Web. 15 Feb. 2016 .

⁴⁷ Hobson p. 28.

exact number, Hobson and MacNeill recruited many Irishman to join the Volunteer movement that day, and over the next year the organization would continue to grow steadily.

Arthur Griffith and the Sinn Fein Party

Arthur Griffith, who was born in Dublin in 1872, became one of the most prominent and outspoken Irish Nationalists in the early 20th century. Griffith was a prolific writer, and published nationalist treatises in various papers, pamphlets, and books. In 1900, he founded the *Cumann na nGaelheal*, which roughly translates into “the League of Gaels.”⁴⁸ Five years later, the *Cumann na nGaelheal* merged with a few other nationalist organizations and Sinn Fein, which translates to either “We Ourselves” or “Ourselves Alone,” was established.⁴⁹ Although Griffith was not the first president of Sinn Fein (that honor belonging to Edward Martyn)⁵⁰ he was one of its most prominent members, especially after his book published in 1904, *The Resurrection of Hungry*, became influential among Irish nationalists. In *The Resurrection of Hungry* Griffith argued that Hungary had regained its self-determination by refusing to send its members of Parliament to Vienna (where the seat of power for the Austrian Empire was) and argued for Ireland to do the same.⁵¹ Griffith was extremely critical of British imperialism, and in a later publication argued that “the Kingdom is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, but the Empire is not the Empire of Great Britain and Ireland. It is the British Empire.” Griffith continued that “the

⁴⁸ Townshend, *Easter 1916*. p. 10.

⁴⁹ Edgar Holt, *Protest in Arms*. (New York: Coward – McCann Inc., 1961) p. 23 and Townshend, *Easter 1916*. p. 11.

⁵⁰ Holt p. 24.

⁵¹ Holt p. 24.

acceptance of the British Empire is the acceptance of English ascendancy,” and was fiercely critical of those Irishmen who felt pride in belonging to the British Empire.⁵²

Sinn Fein, as a political party, preached a doctrine of self-reliance (in keeping with its name) and believed that measures should be taken to ensure Ireland could survive independent of the British Empire. Griffith believed that the British intentionally inhibited the growth of Irish industry in order to quell any potential competition to English manufacturers,⁵³ and even referred to the Great Famine of the 1840’s as an “artificial famine” induced by the British.⁵⁴ In his pamphlet, “When the Government Publishes Sedition,” Griffith argued against British Military recruitment in Ireland, and expressed that:

England having destroyed our constitution, suppressed our parliament, loaded her debt on our shoulders, ruined our trade and commerce, turned our tillage-fields into cattle-ranches, trebled our taxation and halved our population – all within a century, wants what is left of us to fight for her supremacy over the world.⁵⁵

In general, the official policy of Sinn Fein was to work for the “re-establishment of Ireland’s sovereign independence,” by advocating for “passive resistance to English law in Ireland.”⁵⁶

Sinn Fein did not openly call for violence or armed rebellion against the British Government, and Griffith would even refuse to publish material that openly called for violence to be used against the British.⁵⁷ However, Sinn Fein supported the Irish Volunteers, and was certainly not opposed to the idea of a rebellion,⁵⁸ even though they technically had no affiliation with either the I.R.B. or the Volunteers.

⁵² Arthur Griffith, “True and False Imperialism” in *The Irish Review*. Vol. 1 No. 6 (August 1911). JSTOR. p. 270.

⁵³ Arthur Griffith, “Home Rule and the Unionists” in *The Irish Review*. Vol. 2 No. 15 (May 1912). JSTOR. p. 116.

⁵⁴ Arthur Griffith, *When the Government Publishes Sedition*. (Dublin: Irish Publicity League, 1916) P. 9.

⁵⁵ Arthur Griffith, *When the Government Publishes Sedition*. P. 11.

⁵⁶ Cork Executive of Sinn Fein, *Sinn Fein: Its Objects and Means*. (Cork: Patrick Corcoran, 1916) pp. 1-2.

⁵⁷ BMH WS 909 (Mrs. Sidney Czira) p. 19.

⁵⁸ Griffith would, years later, become an active participant in the Anglo-Irish War while serving in the leadership of the rebel government, although he never personally engaged in any fighting or acts of violence.

A major part of Sinn Fein's platform, at least in the years preceding the 1916 Easter Rising, was to fight for the establishment of bodies that would allow for Ireland's economic independence from England. The Constitution of Sinn Fein ratified in October of 1917 declared that the major goals of Sinn Fein would be to reestablish an Irish Mercantile Marine and national stock exchange, survey the country for minerals or resources that could be mined, promote commerce within the country and between Ireland and the European states, and reform the educational system to make the teaching of the Irish language and Irish history compulsory.⁵⁹ Furthermore, Sinn Fein was also a proponent of ensuring workers were paid "a living wage" and required that "the equality of men and women in [Sinn Fein] should be emphasized in all speeches and leaflets."⁶⁰

Even though Sinn Fein wanted independence from England and self-reliance for the Irish people, Griffith and other leading members of Sinn Fein were fiercely opposed to the Home Rule Bill. The Home Rule Bill would not allow an Irish Parliament to control its own independent military force and would allow the British Parliament in Westminster to continue its taxation of Ireland. In fact, under the proposed Home Rule Bill, the Irish Parliament would have little control over its own budget. This was one of Griffith's main arguments against it, and he even wrote that:

If the Bill be amended to give Ireland real control of her soil and taxes and power of finality in her legislation, I shall welcome its passage as a measure for the improvement of conditions in Ireland and a step towards clearing the way to a final settlement between the two nations.⁶¹

However, despite Sinn Fein and Griffith's notoriety within the Republican movement, in the early years of its founding and period before the Easter Rising, Sinn Fein did not have a very

⁵⁹ University College Cork, "Constitution of Sinn Fein." <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/online/E900007/text002.html>

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Griffith, "Home Rule and Unionists" p. 115.

large membership or widespread influence. Some members of the I.R.B. or Volunteers were also members of Sinn Fein, but overall the I.R.B. Supreme Council had a much larger hand in guiding national events than either Griffith or Sinn Fein.

The *Cumann na mBan*

The *Cumann na mBan*, or Irish Woman's Council, was founded in early 1914, on the bequest of Eoin MacNeill, who first proposed the formation of a woman's organization in during his speech at the Rotunda. Like the Volunteers themselves, the founding meeting of the *Cumann na mBan* was held at Wynn's Hotel in Dublin. During his speech, MacNeill called upon Irish women to form an organization to support the men of the Irish Volunteers. MacNeill's wife, Agnes, took a leading role in the establishment of the *Cumann na mBan* and was present at the founding meeting, along with O'Rahilly's sister, Aine, and a few other notables.⁶² The objects of the *Cumann na mBan* as established in the first meeting were:

(1) to advance the cause of Irish Liberty (2) to organize Irish women in furtherance of this object (3) to assist in arming and equipping a body of Irishmen for the defense of Ireland and (4) to form a fund for these purposes to be called the Defense of Ireland Fund.⁶³

Women involved in the *Cumann na mBan* were also taught practical skills such as first aid,⁶⁴ and actively worked to help supply the Irish Volunteers with uniforms and equipment. Sorcha Nic Diarmada, a member of a London based chapter of the *Cumann na mBan*, wrote that for her branch the "chief purpose was to provide arms and also, of course, to collect money for the

⁶² BMH WS 333 (Aine O'Rahilly) p. 1.

⁶³ BMH WS 333 (Aine O'Rahilly) p. 1.

⁶⁴ BMH WS 333 (Aine O'Rahilly) p. 2.

purchase of arms” which was then sent to Ireland.⁶⁵ Many women involved in the *Cumann na mBan* were also active in smuggling arms for the Irish Volunteers. Aine O’Rahilly described that on one occasion, the women of her chapter formed an orchestra so they could hide weapons in instrument cases and escape the watchful eyes of the D.M.P who were engaged in surveillance of O’Rahilly’s home.⁶⁶ Other members of the *Cumann na mBan* colluded with priests, and hid weapons in confessional offering boxes.⁶⁷

Unlike the women’s section of the Irish Citizen Army, a separate paramilitary organization founded by Joseph Connolly, the *Cumann na mBan* was an entirely separate (and arguably subservient) organization from the Irish Volunteers, and women from the *Cumann na mBan* did not take part in drills, marches, or fighting.⁶⁸ Their contribution to the Irish Volunteers was quite significant, however, and after the Easter Rising the *Cumann na mBan* would continue to help support the Irish Republican Army by carrying messages, collecting intelligence, and obtaining arms, just as they did in the years before the Rising.

Together, with organizations like the *Cumann na mBan*, Gaelic League, and Sinn Fein, the Irish Volunteers were gaining popularity, strength, and momentum. As the situation progressed, the priorities of the Volunteers became focused on arming, training, and recruiting. Openly, this was to ensure that the Volunteers would be able to defend the Irish people from any external or internal threat (i.e. the Ulster Volunteers). However, in reality, those within the I.R.B. were already preparing for the possibility of an armed insurrection against the British, for which a strong and well-armed force would be needed.

⁶⁵ BMH WS 945 (Sorcha Nic Diarmada) p. 2.

⁶⁶ BMH WS 333 (Aine O’Rahilly) p. 2.

⁶⁷ BMH WS 945 (Sorcha Nic Diarmada) p. 3.

⁶⁸ Townshend, *Easter 1916*. p. 46.

2. Ireland Armed

Introduction

The years between the formation of the Irish Volunteers and the Easter Rising were tumultuous, and characterized by a sense of uncertainty among both Irish Nationalists and Unionists. England entered the First World War in 1914, the passage of a Home Rule bill seemed dubious, and Irish Nationalists continued to view the Ulster Volunteer Force as an imminent threat. However, despite the tense nature of this period relatively little open violence broke out until the Easter Rising of April 24, 1916. Instead, the years between 1913 and 1916 were filled with armament, training, recruitment, and organization – all of which were devastated by the split in the Volunteers that took place after John Redmond’s infamous speech at Woodenbridge, in September of 1914.

The Acquisition of Arms

Patrick Henry Pearse once wrote that “Ireland unarmed will attain just as much freedom as it is convenient for England to give her; Ireland armed will attain ultimately just as much freedom as she wants.”⁶⁹ Soon after the establishment of the Irish Volunteers, the procurement of weapons became the major objective of both the I.R.B. and the Volunteers. As Bulmer Hobson wrote some years later, “when the Volunteers were started in 1913 we very rapidly got an enormous number of members, variously estimated to be between 100,000 and 150,000.”⁷⁰ However Hobson adds that “while we had this vast membership, we had very little funds and

⁶⁹ Patrick Pearse, “The Coming Revolution” in *The Irish Volunteers: Recollections & Documents*. ed. F.X. Martin (Sallins, Ireland: Merrion, 2013) p. 71.

⁷⁰ Bulmer Hobson, “Gun-Running at Howth and Kilcoole” in *The Irish Volunteers: Recollections & Documents*. ed. F.X. Martin (Sallins, Ireland: Merrion, 2013) p. 45. This number is likely exaggerated by Hobson in this account.

virtually no arms.”⁷¹ Although some Irish households owned shotguns, modern rifles and revolvers were scarce. Officers in the R.I.C. and members of the British Military were equipped with rifles and revolvers, and easily outgunned any company of Irish Volunteers. O’Rahilly stressed that “every Volunteer [...] must be armed, and armed immediately,”⁷² and many veterans of the I.R.B. and the Irish Volunteers described how members paid a “subscription for the purchase of arms” upon joining either organization.⁷³ Other nationalist organizations, like the U.S. based *Clan na Gael* and *Fianna Éireann*, also supported the Volunteers, and donations for the purpose of purchasing arms were frequently collected from Republican or Nationalist supporters.⁷⁴ Until arms could be procured, some groups of Volunteers drilled with sticks in the place of rifles,⁷⁵ or carried batons rather than firearms during marches and demonstrations.⁷⁶

It was often the case that prior to the Easter Rising, entire columns of Volunteers would have only two or three rifles, making them extremely valuable resources.⁷⁷ Desmond Fitzgerald, who founded of a Kerry company of Irish Volunteers, wrote in his memoir that, “men with rifles were a novelty,” and that people were quite surprised to see a group of Volunteers armed with rifles.⁷⁸ Revolvers were also a sought after commodity, since as one member of both the I.R.B. and Irish Volunteers noted it was “understood that [their] work in the case of a rising would be sabotage of transport, communication, docks, etc, etc,”⁷⁹ and revolvers were well suited to that type of close quarters urban combat.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² “The State of the Irish Volunteers, October, 1915” in *The Irish Volunteers: Recollections & Documents*. ed. F.X. Martin (Sallins, Ireland: Merrion, 2013) p. 209.

⁷³ BMH WS 152 (Arthur Agnew) p. 1. And BMH WS 361 (Pedar Bracken) p.1.

⁷⁴ Bulmer Hobson, “The I.R.B. and the Fianna” in *The Irish Volunteers: Recollections & Documents*. ed. F.X. Martin (Sallins, Ireland: Merrion, 2013) p. 34.

⁷⁵ FitzGerald. p. 51.

⁷⁶ Bulmer Hobson, “The I.R.B. and the Fianna” p. 34.

⁷⁷ BMH WS 975 (Matthew Finucane) p. 1.

⁷⁸ FitzGerald p. 52.

⁷⁹ BMH WS 152 (Arthur Agnew) p. 2.

Most units of Irish Volunteers had a quartermaster in charge of caring for, distributing, and hiding, the weapons collected by the Volunteer Company. Patrick Clifford, the quartermaster of one Mitchelston company of Volunteers described how he hid arms from the authorities:

A suitable wooden box was prepared, painted, greased, ect. and was built into the fence. The open end of the box was practically in line with the edge of the fence at a gap – the opening being closed by a stone of suitable size. The gap was then blocked with Whitethorn bushes ect. which could be replaced after anything had been removed from or replaced in the dump and would obliterate all makes made by anyone working in the vicinity.⁸⁰

Since most of the money raised by the Volunteers went to the purchase of arms and ammunition, the loss of arms could be devastating and hard to replace, since the British tried to prevent any arms from being brought into the country.

Great lengths were taken to smuggle arms into the country for the Volunteers. Bulmer Hobson wrote in detail about efforts to import arms into Ireland in 1914, describing how Sir Roger Casement, a former British consular official who actively supported the Irish Volunteers, developed a strategy in which he would collect money from wealthy “subscribers” to buy weapons in Antwerp, and then “bring them to Ireland, sell the arms to the Irish Volunteers and reimburse the subscribers.”⁸¹ The most famous arms landing in the history of the Volunteers occurred at Howth, a small peninsula directly above the city of Dublin. For the Howth landing, which took place on July 26, 1914, Darrell Figgis purchased 1500 old Mauser rifles from the Franco-Prussian War and 45,000 rounds of ammunition for £1500, which were then transferred to the Yachts of Erskine Childers and Conor O’Brien. O’Brien failed to get his yacht passed the patrols of the British Navy, but Childers managed to successfully get 900 of the rifles to Howth.

To avoid detection by the British forces, for weeks prior the Volunteers held marches along different routes making it appear that their marches were routine training exercises. At first

⁸⁰ BMH WS 946 (Patrick Clifford) p. 4.

⁸¹ Bulmer Hobson, “Gun-Running at Howth and Kilcoole” p. 45.

the R.I.C. kept careful watch over the marches, but eventually allowed them to go on unhindered when they appeared to be benign.⁸² When scouting Howth as a possible site for the landing, O’Rahilly even brought his children with him, in order to make it look as if he was simply taking a day trip with his family. According to his sister Aine, O’Rahilly “made the children play hide and seek near the coastguard station and in that way got into a conversation with the coastguards,” which he used to determine the best method of smuggling in the rifles.⁸³ On the morning the yacht arrived at Howth, Cathal Brugha was sent to secure the port ahead of time with 20 I.R.B. men who “were each instructed to invite a lady friend out for the day.”⁸⁴ Hobson describes that:

They were to go by taxi to Howth and order lunch at the hotel, keeping a close watch on the harbor. When they saw the yacht coming in they were to abandon both the ladies and the lunch and bring their taxis up the harbor ready to carry their appointed loads to their appointed destination.⁸⁵

Despite the careful planning of Hobson and the leadership, on the trip back from Howth the Volunteers were confronted by both the R.I.C. and British military. To illustrate the tense nature of the time, the Volunteers were marching with their newly acquired rifles unloaded, but upon reaching the British forces blocking the road “a number of the Volunteers made repeated attempts to rush the Fianna trek carts to get some ammunition with which to fire at the police.”⁸⁶ However, this was prevented by the Fianna, who were purposefully entrusted with the ammunition so the Volunteers would not have the option to engage the R.I.C. or British military personnel. Fortunately each side refrained from opening fire, and as the officer in charge of the R.I.C. and military was being distracted the Volunteers in the rear of the column managed to slip

⁸² Bulmer Hobson, “Gun-Running at Howth and Kilcoole” p. 47.

⁸³ BMH WS 333 (Aine O’Rahilly) p. 3.

⁸⁴ Bulmer Hobson, “Gun-Running at Howth and Kilcoole” p. 48.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Bulmer Hobson, “Gun-Running at Howth and Kilcoole” p. 51.

away. Although 19 rifles were confiscated from those near the front, both sides walked away without any casualties, and Howth became the most successful landing of weapons in the history of the Volunteers.⁸⁷ The meticulous planning done by Hobson and the leadership of the Irish Volunteers was the key to the success of missions like the landing at Howth, and great lengths were taken to lead the British Military and R.I.C. astray.

Recruitment, Propaganda, and Training

Although the acquisition of arms was a major focus of the Irish Volunteers in the years preceding the Easter Rising, recruitment and training were also highly emphasized. Many who joined the Irish Volunteers were relatively young and often had a previous connection to some sort of Republican or Nationalist movement. Like the I.R.B., the Irish Volunteers absorbed recruits from the Fianna, G.A.A., and the Gaelic League. The I.R.B. itself played a significant role in recruitment for the Irish Volunteers, since its members were instructed to join companies of Irish Volunteers and encouraged to gain a hold of leadership positions.⁸⁸ Although not every Volunteer was a member of the I.R.B., nearly every member of the I.R.B. was a Volunteer. Furthermore, *The Irish Volunteer* (or *Óglaigh na hÉireann*) would publish articles with the aim of attracting new recruits to join the Volunteers. Bulmer Hobson stated in a 1915 report that *The Irish Volunteer* had “been most valuable as a propagandist organ throughout the year.”⁸⁹ The first issue of *The Irish Volunteer* was published in February of 1914, and the newspaper remained in publication until the Easter Rising. In 1918, a new paper titled *An t-Óglác* came into

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ BMH WS 230 (John Southwell) p. 5.

⁸⁹ “The State of the Irish Volunteers, October 1915” in *The Irish Volunteers* p. 207.

publication and filled the void left by *The Irish Volunteer*, becoming the primary publication of the Irish Republican Army.⁹⁰

The propaganda published in periodicals like *The Irish Volunteer* was often aimed at inciting fear in the Irish people and painting images of British tyranny, while simultaneously painting the Irish Volunteers as the saviors of Irish Liberty and Freedom. In one article aimed at attracting potential recruits to join the Volunteers, Patrick Henry Pearse wrote that “we want recruits because we are sure of the rightness of our cause.”⁹¹ Pearse then elaborates that:

What if Conscription be forced upon Ireland? What if a Unionist or a Coalition British Ministry repudiates the Home Rule Act? What if it be determined to dismember Ireland? What if it be attempted to disarm Ireland? The future is big with these and other possibilities. And these are among the reasons we want recruits.⁹²

These were all very real concerns for average Irish people, and the idea of conscription into the British Military frightened many Irishman once World War I broke out.

Recruitment posters were also issued, with messages like “the Irish Volunteers are trained and armed to fight IN Ireland to secure and maintain the rights and liberties common to all the people of Ireland.”⁹³

Although *The Irish Volunteer* was the primary organ of propaganda for the Volunteers before the Easter Rising, other nationalist organizations had their own publications. The official publication of the Gaelic League was *An Claidheamh Soluis*, and was established by Eoin MacNeill.⁹⁴ *The Secret History of the Irish Volunteers* was

⁹⁰ “An t-Óglách Magazine” Irish Department of Defense Military Archives. Last Modified 2015. <http://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/an-toglach-magazine>

⁹¹ Patrick Henry Pearse, “Why We Want Recruits” in *The Irish Volunteers: Recollections & Documents*. ed. F.X. Martin (Sallins, Ireland: Merrion, 2013) p. 202.

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Recruitment Poster in *The Irish Volunteers*. No Page Number listed.

⁹⁴ Bulmer Hobson, “Ireland’s Hour of Destiny” in *The Irish Volunteers: Recollections & Documents*. ed. F.X. Martin (Sallins, Ireland: Merrion, 2013) p. 38.

written by O’Rahilly, and was published in Dublin in 1915.⁹⁵ In the years leading up to the rising “recruiting literature, window cards, etc.,” were distributed by “recruiting bodies” established by the Irish Volunteers as a way of attracting more men to enroll in their local company of Volunteers.⁹⁶

Since it was known that associating with the Irish Volunteers could be potentially hazardous, a “Defense of Ireland Fund” was established by the Central Executive and General Council as a “mutual insurance society” in order to help support members of the Volunteers and their families in the event they lost their means to support themselves, specifically for those who “were imprisoned or lost their employment on account of their connection with the Irish Volunteers.”⁹⁷ Policies like the Defense of Ireland Fund likely helped encourage recruitment as well, since it provided security for potential recruits who had a family.⁹⁸ A report of this program published in *The Irish Volunteer* reported that “a large number of Volunteers” had paid into the Defense Fund, but the exact number of those who took advantage of the program is unclear.

After the failed Easter Rising, the amount of propaganda distributed by both the Irish Volunteers and the Daíl Éireann⁹⁹ increased dramatically. Aine Ceannt, the widow of Eamon Ceannt (who was executed for his role in the Rising), wrote that “during the fight for independence after 1916, which culminated in the Truce in 1921, propaganda was one of the strongest weapons used by the Dáil Éireann.”¹⁰⁰ During this time (the period of 1919-1921) there were many different ministers of propaganda for the Dáil,

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ “The State of the Irish Volunteers, October 1915” p. 208.

⁹⁸ Frank Gallaher. *Days of Fear*. (New York: Harper Brothers Publishers, 1929) pp. 80-81.

⁹⁹ The Daíl Éireann was the parliamentary body formed by Irish Republicans in 1919, when elected members of Parliament refused to take their seats in Westminster.

¹⁰⁰ BMH WS 264 (Aine Ceannt) p. 65.

including Erskine Childers and Desmond Fitzgerald, since members of the Dáil were often arrested by the British Military or R.I.C. However, during this time the Dáil managed to distribute propaganda throughout Ireland and in various countries such as Spain, Italy, and France, who were “sent copies of the ‘Irish Bulletin’ and other pamphlets.”¹⁰¹ A strong emphasis was put on Irish nationalism in these pamphlets, and Aine Ceannt added that “in 1921 there was also established *Cumann Léigheact an Phobail*, which was a committee set up to compile booklets on various subjects for distribution to the Sinn Fein Clubs,” that were often published in both English and Irish.¹⁰²

Although the Fianna Éireann was established not only “to promote the study of Irish Language and to make boys sound nationally,” but also “to re-establish the Independence of Ireland” by means of “the training of the youth of Ireland, mentally and physically [...] by teaching, scouting, and military exercises,”¹⁰³ many new members of the Volunteers had little military experience or training. Therefore, most groups of Volunteers had at least one or two drills a week, where the members of the company would meet, discuss tactics, and train.¹⁰⁴ In many cases Irish veterans of the British Army were recruited to train the Volunteers,¹⁰⁵ and the company was expected to “follow exactly the drill set out in the *British Infantry Manual, 1911.*”¹⁰⁶ However, although the Volunteers would bring former soldiers to train the Volunteers, many of these ex-soldiers were often looked upon with deep suspicion, and were typically not accepted into the

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² BMH WS 264 (Aine Ceannt) p. 66.

¹⁰³ Bulmer Hobson, “The I.R.B. and the Fianna. pp. 32-33.

¹⁰⁴ BMH WS 164 (James Wall) p. 1.

¹⁰⁵ BMH WS 975 (Matthew Finucane) p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ “Military Instructions for Units, 1914.” in *The Irish Volunteers: Recollections & Documents*. ed. F.X. Martin (Sallins, Ireland: Merrion, 2013). p. 133.

ranks of the Irish Volunteers themselves. During training, a wide variety of tactics were discussed. As one former volunteer described:

We had lectures from Pearse on street fighting and barricading of the streets, lanes, ect. We were told not to man the barricades physically, but to cover them from the nearby houses. We also got instruction on boring, in a zig zag manner, from house to house.¹⁰⁷

Long before the Easter Rising, the leaders of the Volunteers understood that this rebellion would not be fought on a traditional battlefield, but rather in the streets of Dublin itself.

Instructors also had the Volunteers practice marching, and trained them in the use of firearms, most new Volunteers had no experience firing a rifle (since at most, their family may have owned a shotgun for hunting). However, ammunition was a luxury in this period, and in order to save ammunition men continued to drill with fake rifles even after real rifles were obtained.¹⁰⁸ The leadership of the Irish Volunteers also established training camps held during the summer months at various locations around the country in 1915 (held in Co. Tyrone in July, in Wicklow and North Co. Cork in August, and in Co. Galway in September). According to reports approximately 200 men attended these camps which provided a more intensive training than the normal drills with the local Volunteer companies.¹⁰⁹ As for any militia, state sponsored or otherwise, both training and discipline are crucial to their effectiveness, and the leaders of the Irish Volunteers put much effort into ensuring the men were ready to take up arms to defend the Irish nation and people.

¹⁰⁷ BMH WS 152 (Arthur Agnew) p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ FitzGerald p. 51.

¹⁰⁹ "The State of the Irish Volunteers, October, 1915" pp. 207-208.

Organization of the Irish Volunteer Company Before 1916

The headquarters of the Irish Volunteers issued regulations that all companies were required to adhere to. Although the officers in each company of Irish Volunteers were usually elected by the men,¹¹⁰ the officers still had to answer to the Central Executive and the General Council, and could not give any orders that countermanded either the constitution of the Irish Volunteers or those on the Central Executive.¹¹¹ Since the various Volunteer companies were spread out across the entire country, communication with the leadership at the headquarters in Dublin was an important concern,¹¹² and carriers frequently carried instructions from Dublin out to Volunteer companies across the country.

Companies were also instructed to be as inclusive as possible for anyone interested in joining, in order to “combat any idea that the Volunteers are to enable any one section of Irishmen to secure a political advantage over any other section.”¹¹³ The Central Executive wanted to paint the Ulster Volunteers as the separatists who cared little for inclusion, and certainly did not want to see the conflict become sectarian that it would undermine their claim to legitimacy which stemmed from their embrace of nationalism and desire to attain Irish liberty. However, the Irish Volunteers remained closely associated with both the I.R.B. and Sinn Fein (and remained predominantly Catholic), despite the efforts to maintain neutrality and become repetitive of the Irish population as a whole.

Like any military organization, the Irish Volunteers were organized in a specific fashion. Ideally, a company of Volunteers was to be divided into four sections, with each section

¹¹⁰ BMH WS 59 (Con Ahern) p. 2.

¹¹¹ “General Instructions for Forming Companies”, in *The Irish Volunteers: Recollections & Documents*. ed. F.X. Martin (Sallins, Ireland: Merrion, 2013) p. 131.

¹¹² “General Instructions for Forming Companies” p. 132

¹¹³ “General Instructions for Forming Companies” p. 131

consisting of two squads. The squad was “to be composed of eight men”, so the ideal company was to consist of roughly 64 men led by 1 Captain, 2 Lieutenants, 4 Sergeants, and 8 corporals.¹¹⁴ Although this was how the leadership of the Irish Volunteers wished each company to look like, there was a wide range of company sizes, and many companies of Irish Volunteers had fewer than the full complement of 64. Thomas Barry, Captain of a Cork Company of Volunteers wrote that at the time of the Easter Rising his company consisted of only 18 men.¹¹⁵ However, another Captain wrote that prior to the Rising he estimated that both the Tullamore Company and Athlone Company each had around 100 men,¹¹⁶ so the sizes of each Company varied quite a bit.

The Split in the Volunteers

The controversial speech given by John Redmond at Woodenbridge became one of the seminal events that defined the Irish Volunteer movement prior to the Easter Rising. John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Parliamentary party, champion of the Home Rule movement, and an elected member to the British House of Commons,¹¹⁷ became very influential in Ireland and was well respected by many Irish Republicans, including those involved with the Irish Volunteers. Although Redmond was in favor of working within the British Parliament, he was certainly no unionist, and appealed to many moderate Irish nationalists. However, Redmond was closely associated with the Liberal party in England and had respect for the British Government. When World War I broke out, Redmond encouraged Irishmen to join the British Military, and

¹¹⁴ “Military Instructions for Units in The Irish Volunteers” in *The Irish Volunteers: Recollections & Documents*. ed. F.X. Martin (Sallins, Ireland: Merrion, 2013) p. 133.

¹¹⁵ BMH WS 430 (Thomas Barry) p. 1.

¹¹⁶ BMH WS 361 (Pedar Bracken) p. 6.

¹¹⁷ Britannica Academic, s. v. "John Redmond," accessed November 08, 2015, <http://academic.eb.com/EBchecked/topic/494724/John-Edward-Redmond>.

argued that to safeguard Ireland; the people must also fight for the survival of the United Kingdom. In his speech at Woodenbridge in September of 1914, Redmond called upon the Irish Volunteers to join the British armed forces and fight abroad to aid the allies during the war. This request from Redmond countermanded the ideas and commands of Hobson, O’Rahilly, and MacNeill (as well as the other I.R.B. members in the Central Executive of the Volunteers) who believed true nationalists should ignore England’s call for soldiers. Despite the Central Executive’s position, many members of the Irish Volunteers felt that supporting England in the war was the path to finally gaining autonomy, since discussion of the Home Rule bill had been suspended until after the war. However by this point in time those within the I.R.B., as well as others who followed MacNeill and Griffith, believed that Home Rule was destined to fail regardless, and believed that England’s success in the war would only enable them to continue oppressing the Irish people. A schism was inevitable, the Volunteer movement split between those supporting Redmond and those supporting Hobson and MacNeill. Eventually a large group supporting Redmond broke off from the Irish Volunteers and formed their own organization, known as the National Volunteers.¹¹⁸

The split was devastating to the original Volunteer force, and as Pedar Bracken, a Captain in the Volunteers described “the committee, by a small majority, decided to stand by the old Executive, but the greater portion of the Volunteers followed Redmond.”¹¹⁹ Mathew Finucane, of member of the Irish Volunteers in Kerry wrote that the split affected his company so drastically it completely fell apart, and was not reorganized until 1916.¹²⁰ In many companies membership plummeted, and Hobson estimated that only somewhere between two and three

¹¹⁸ BMH WS 979 (Robert Barton) pp. 8-10.

¹¹⁹ BMH WS 361 (Pedar Bracken) p. 2.

¹²⁰ BMH WS 975 (Matthew Finucane) p. 1.

thousand men remained with the Irish Volunteers right after the split (though their strength gradually increased again until the 1916 Rising).¹²¹ Some companies had to resort to creative methods of recruitment, and Oscar Traynor, a member of a Dublin company of the Volunteers, described that in his Company the Volunteer who recruited the most people after the split was awarded a revolver.¹²² Although the split certainly hurt the Irish Volunteers, those that did remain were often those also associated with the I.R.B., or those who were more openly hostile to British hegemony in Ireland. It would go too far to say that the split radicalized the Volunteers, but it likely made it easier for those in the I.R.B. to push the Volunteers toward open rebellion.

Although many of the Volunteers supported Redmond, the National Volunteers never reached the same level of organization or cohesion as the Irish Volunteers. John Southwell wrote that:

A number of the National Volunteers were reservists in the British Army and were called for active service. A number of others volunteered their service for the Army. The organization of the National Volunteers, after this happened, to some extent broke down. There was little enthusiasm among the rank and file who remained, as many of them did not feel any great urge to take a personal part in England's war.¹²³

Desmond Fitzgerald, who was openly hostile to Redmond, concurred with Southwell in his memoir writing that before long the National Volunteers “felt they were no longer part of a great national movement” and gradually dissolved.¹²⁴ However, by Fitzgerald’s own admission there were some incredibly fervent Redmond supporters during the split, who assaulted Fitzgerald verbally and physically accusing those remaining loyal to Sinn Fein and the Irish Volunteers of

¹²¹ Bulmer Hobson, “John Redmond and the Volunteers in *The Irish Volunteers: Recollections & Documents*. ed. F.X. Martin (Sallins, Ireland: Merrion, 2013) p. 62.

¹²² BMH WS 340 (Oscar Traynor) p. 2.

¹²³ BMH WS 230 (John Southwell) p. 8.

¹²⁴ FitzGerald p. 59.

being traitors and in the pocket of the Kaiser.¹²⁵ It would later be revealed that the latter insult was not entirely inaccurate, as Roger Casement and some members of the I.R.B. began negotiating with the Germans. Overall, the split was incredibly divisive, and there were dedicated supporters on both sides. Many who remained loyal to the Irish Volunteers, especially those in the leadership, viewed Redmond as a traitor to the Irish people. For these people, Redmond's policy delegitimized the Irish Parliamentary party. Seán T. O'Kelly, who was active in both the I.R.B. and Irish Volunteers (and would eventually become President of the Republic of Ireland), wrote that:

Redmond's statement of policy, which was as far as we knew accepted unanimously by the Irish Parliamentary Party, cleared the air as far as we were concerned. We knew now exactly where we stood and the heavy responsibilities that lay with us.¹²⁶

Redmond's actions at Woodenbridge likely served as another catalyst for the Easter Rising, since those in the leadership of the both the Irish Volunteers and I.R.B. lost all faith in the Irish Parliamentary Party, and felt that it was up to them to launch a rebellion. Although the initial schism was damaging to the Irish Volunteers, in the years following the split the Irish Volunteers once again became the prominent organization, with the National Volunteers disappearing almost completely after the Easter Rising.

¹²⁵ FitzGerald pp. 56-57.

¹²⁶ BMH WS 1765 (Seán T. O'Kelly) p. 4.

3. Ireland's August Destiny

Planning the Rising

The Easter Rising of 1916 was not planned by the Executive Committee of the Irish Volunteers or the I.R.B. Supreme Council. Although the Supreme Council did decide to carry out an insurrection against the British (which had always been the ultimate goal of the I.R.B.) it never determined when this insurrection would be, and those who planned the Rising never informed the Supreme Council of any details.¹²⁷ As Denis McCullough described, the Rising was “organized and planned by the Military Council set up by the Supreme Council [of the I.R.B.]”¹²⁸ It is likely that Sean MacDermott and Joseph Plunkett were the instigators of plot, but the other members of the special Military Council included Thomas MacDonagh, James Connolly, Eamonn Ceannt, Patrick Henry Pearse, and Thomas Clarke.¹²⁹ Although the conspirators planned for a Rising without the express knowledge of either the I.R.B. Supreme Council or Central Executive of the Irish Volunteers, they were all closely affiliated with the two organizations. At the time MacDonagh, Ceannt, and Pearse, served on the Central Executive of the Volunteers, and MacDermott and Clarke served on the Executive of the I.R.B. Supreme Council as its secretary and treasurer, respectively.

The split in the Volunteer movement caused by Redmond had lasting impacts on the leadership of both the Volunteers who remained loyal to the Central Executive and the I.R.B. Bulmer Hobson, who had supported Redmond's effort to place some of his own supporters in leadership positions of the Irish Volunteers, “resigned from the Supreme Council [of the I.R.B.]

¹²⁷ BMH WS 916 (Denis McCullough) p. 8.

¹²⁸ BMH WS 916 (Denis McCullough) p. 4.

¹²⁹ Townshend, *Easter 1916* p. 95.

because of the bitterness of Tom Clarke particularly and of Sean MacDermott.”¹³⁰ According to Denis McCullough:

Tom Clarke, who was a man of a very simple mind, loved and admired Hobson immensely. Consequently, when Hobson was guilty of what Tom considered a betrayal, the rift was very bitter and Tom would not forgive him or trust him again.¹³¹

Hobson’s departure from the I.R.B. Supreme Council served to further remove him from any plans the Military Council made, and alienated him from the orchestrators of the Rising. After the Rising Hobson was extremely critical of those on the I.R.B. Military Council, writing:

MacDermott and Pearse, and those who thought with them, finding it utterly impossible to persuade the Volunteer Executive to abandon this system for their policy of an insurrectionary demonstration, entered into a secret agreement with Connolly to bring the Volunteers out in an insurrection unprepared and unaware of what they were being let in for.¹³²

Hobson also referred to those on the Military Council as a “junta,” and charged them with ignoring the constitution of the I.R.B. that was amended after the failed rebellion of 1867.

According to Hobson the constitution stated that “the I.R.B. shall await the decision of the Irish Nation as expressed by a majority of the Irish people as to the fit hour of inaugurating a war against England.”¹³³ Even on the eve of the Rising, there was a fierce division within the Republican movement as to whether or not it was the correct time to stage an insurrection.

Many Irish Republicans, including Bulmer Hobson, Eoin MacNeill, and Desmond Fitzgerald, hoped to win the support of the Germans, and did not believe an insurrection against the British would succeed without either German arms or a German invasion force. FitzGerald wrote that before the Rising “we had taken it for granted that we should be co-operating with a

¹³⁰ BMH WS 916 (Denis McCullough) p. 7.

¹³¹ BMH WS 916 (Denis McCullough) p. 7.

¹³² BMH WS 81 (Bulmer Hobson) p. 5.

¹³³ BMH WS 81 (Bulmer Hobson) p. 8.

great power whose forces and equipment would be brought to Ireland.”¹³⁴ Joseph O’Rourke, the Center of one Dublin Circle of the I.R.B., expressed similar sentiments, and said that the I.R.B. was anticipating that the Germans would be able to supply them with modern weapons by the mid-summer of 1916.¹³⁵ Roger Casement, who had embarked on a mission to gather funds and support for the Volunteers in the United States, worked closely with John Devoy, the leader of the *Clan na Gael* (a U.S. based Irish separatist organization affiliated with the I.R.B.). Devoy, who saw the outbreak of WWI shortly after Casement’s arrival in New York as a great opportunity, immediately contacted the German Ambassador in Washington, Count Bernstorff.¹³⁶ With both Devoy and Bernstorff’s encouragement, Casement decided to travel from the United States to Berlin and seek German support for an Irish insurrection.¹³⁷

Casement arrived in Germany on October 31, 1915, and immediately entered into negotiations with the German foreign ministry.¹³⁸ However, it seems the leadership (at least within the I.R.B.) had little faith in Casement’s ability,¹³⁹ and Joseph Plunkett arrived to Berlin in early 1916. Together he and Casement continued to press a somewhat reluctant German Foreign Ministry for aid. Casement and Plunkett pitched a detailed plan for a German invasion of the west coast of Ireland, and requested 12,000 German soldiers bring with them 40,000 modern rifles. They hoped that if the Germans took the city of Limerick and sufficiently armed the local Volunteer companies, they could establish a large defendable foothold within Ireland.¹⁴⁰ However, over time it became apparent that the German government had no real intention of sending troops, since it would be extremely difficult and risky for an invasion force of that

¹³⁴ FitzGerald p. 110.

¹³⁵ BMH WS 1224 (Joseph O’Rourke) p. 7.

¹³⁶ Holt p. 74.

¹³⁷ Holt p. 74.

¹³⁸ Townshend *Easter 1916* p. 105.

¹³⁹ Holt p. 75.

¹⁴⁰ Townshend *Easter 1916* p. 106.

magnitude to pass through British controlled waters,¹⁴¹ and they likely felt the risk would not be worth the reward. Despite their unwillingness to send soldiers to Ireland, the German Government did pledge Plunkett 20,000 rifles and ammunition, which the Volunteers could use themselves. Although there are conflicting reports of Casement's attitude, it appears that he believed weapons alone would not be sufficient enough to carry out a rising, and thought that without German troops supporting the Volunteers any insurrection would fail. In contrast, Plunkett (and likely the other members of the Military Council) believed they could still carry out a Rising with German arms alone.¹⁴² Apparently, in a last minute attempt to stop the planned Rising, or at least with the desire to be in Ireland while it was carried out, Casement convinced the German government to give him and two others passage on a U-boat back to Ireland. Although the U-boat arrived off the coast of Ireland safely, early on the morning of Good Friday 1916 Casement landed ashore in Co. Galway, but was quickly apprehended by members of the R.I.C. and placed under arrest.

Unfortunately, the Germans had decided to load all 20,000 rifles and the ammunition they had pledged aboard a captured Swedish ship called the *Aud*.¹⁴³ While the *Aud* set sail, there was a massive failure of communication between the Irish Volunteers and the German Foreign Ministry, and when the *Aud* arrived off the coast of Ireland late in the evening on Holy Thursday, there were no Volunteers present to unload the massive shipment of arms. While the *Aud* was awaiting contact with the Volunteers, it was discovered by the British Navy early on the morning

¹⁴¹ Townshend *Easter 1916* p. 116.

¹⁴² Townshend *Easter 1916* p. 107.

¹⁴³ Holt p. 87.

of Good Friday, and the German captain was forced to scuttle the ship, destroying it along with all the arms and ammunition.¹⁴⁴

The weekend before the Rising was extremely chaotic, and saw a major conflict erupt between Hobson and MacNeill, and the rest of the I.R.B. Military Council. Late in the evening on Holy Thursday, two associates of Hobson came into his office and informed him that an insurrection was set to take place on Easter Sunday.¹⁴⁵ Upon hearing this news, Hobson went immediately to MacNeill's house and woke him. The two then went to Pearse's house in the middle of the night to confront him. According to Hobson (who admittedly had a very negative view of Pearse), Pearse admitted to the pair that the Rising was set to begin Easter Sunday, and ensured them they were powerless to prevent it.¹⁴⁶ Whether or not Pearse's attitude was as confrontational as Hobson described, previously that day Pearse had issued orders to the Dublin Brigade of the Irish Volunteers ordering them to "mobilize Easter Sunday at the hour of 2.45 p.m."¹⁴⁷ By the time Hobson and MacNeill confronted him, it seems Pearse and the others were absolutely intent on carrying out the Rising.

The series of events that followed Hobson and MacNeill's discovery of the plans for a Rising are quite convoluted. It appears that initially MacNeill decided against interfering in the plans of the I.R.B. Military Council. However, once MacNeill was informed of the arrest of Roger Casement, he issued orders to the Volunteer companies to call off "the Sunday maneuvers" which were merely a front for the Easter Rising.¹⁴⁸ MacNeill sent O'Rahilly and

¹⁴⁴ Holt p. 87.

¹⁴⁵ BMH WS 81 (Bulmer Hobson) p. 11.

¹⁴⁶ BMH WS 81 (Bulmer Hobson) p. 11.

¹⁴⁷ Pearse, *Letters from PH Pearse* p. 362.

¹⁴⁸ BMH WS 1765 (Seán T. O'Kelly) p. 236.

others out as couriers on Sunday morning, with orders countermanding the rising.¹⁴⁹ He also drafted a statement late Saturday night, which appeared in the *Sunday Independent*, stating:

Owing to the very critical position all orders given to the Irish Volunteers for tomorrow, Easter Sunday, are hereby rescinded, and no parades, marches, or other movements of the Irish Volunteers will take place. Each individual Volunteer will obey this order strictly in every particular.¹⁵⁰

Once MacNeill issued these orders the leadership of the I.R.B. was enraged, and at a meeting late Sunday evening in MacNeill's house MacDonagh got into a heated discussion with MacNeill.¹⁵¹

Sean O'Kelly, who was present at the time, wrote that:

McDonagh then, in my hearing, said to him that he, MacNeill, had full knowledge of all that was intended to take place that week and that he had accepted and agreed to the arrangements that had been made, and that in his opinion this was no time, at this late hour to start upsetting what had been agreed to and arranged.¹⁵²

MacDonagh apparently went on to state that the Volunteers would carry out the Rising despite the counter orders given by MacNeill, and informed him that Pearse had more influence with the Volunteers than MacNeill, and could lead them if need be. MacNeill later asked O'Kelly if he thought that was true, and O'Kelly responded that he "felt certain that the Volunteers of the city, those of them who were members of the I.R.B. or under I.R.B. influence would accept Pearse's orders."¹⁵³ Eamonn Ceannt was also infuriated with MacNeill, and went so far as to remark that "if he had full authority MacNeill should be shot."¹⁵⁴

Meanwhile, Bulmer Hobson, who like MacNeill, was opposed to the idea of an armed insurrection, had been arrested and kidnapped on the morning of Good Friday by members of the

¹⁴⁹ FitzGerald p. 124.

¹⁵⁰ Holt p. 87.

¹⁵¹ BMH WS 213 (Agnes MacNeill) p. 2.

¹⁵² BMH WS 1765 (Seán T. O'Kelly) p. 236.

¹⁵³ BMH WS 1765 (Seán T. O'Kelly) p. 237.

¹⁵⁴ BMH WS 1765 (Seán T. O'Kelly) p. 239.

I.R.B. under orders from the I.R.B. Military Council, ensuring he would not attempt to intervene in their plans.¹⁵⁵ Upon learning this, O’Rahilly was reportedly furious, and even drew a weapon on Pearse when he confronted him on the matter.¹⁵⁶ However, the extent to which Hobson, MacNeill, and O’Rahilly were aware of the plans for the rising is unclear. It seems likely, that if the I.R.B. Military Council thought it necessary to place Hobson under arrest, they believed he would actively try and prevent the Rising. If that is the case, then it would be logical to assume the I.R.B. Military Council believed MacNeill would not interfere, since he was left unmolested after confronting Pearse about his plans for the Rising Thursday evening. That, combined with MacDonagh’s statement to him Sunday evening (stating MacNeill knew and agreed about the Rising) seems to indicate that even if MacNeill really was kept in the dark until Holy Thursday, he subsequently agreed not to interfere with the plan. It is possible MacNeill had a change of heart once he learned of Casement’s arrest and the failed attempt to unload weapons from the *Aud*, but MacNeill’s wife asserted that he “knew nothing about the arrangement for the landing of German arms in Kerry.”¹⁵⁷ If that statement is true, then the news of Casement’s arrest and the failed arms landing (which MacNeill received late Saturday) should not have been what pushed MacNeill to finally countermand Pearse’s orders. However, it is always possible MacNeill agreed to let the Rising occur on Thursday and simply got nervous and changed his mind on Saturday.

Why MacNeill acted when he did, and for what reasons, may never be completely clear, but his last minute countermanding orders had a profound effect on the Easter Rising. Late Sunday night Pearse sent the following message out to Volunteer Companies across the country:

¹⁵⁵ BMH WS 81 (Bulmer Hobson) p. 13.

¹⁵⁶ BMH WS 358 (Geraldine Dillon) p. 12.

¹⁵⁷ BMH WS 213 (Agnes MacNeill) p. 2.

“We start operations at noon today, Monday. Carry out your instructions.”¹⁵⁸ Pearse also sent an order Monday morning to MacDonagh, the commandant of the 2nd Battalion of the Dublin Brigade (and who had overall command of the 4 battalions during the Rising) stating that “the four city battalions will parade for inspection and route march at 10.00 a.m. today” and ordered them to carry “full arms and equipment and one day’s rations.”¹⁵⁹ The Military Council’s plan was to establish a defensive perimeter around the center of Dublin and hold it against any British incursions, while Volunteer companies all around the country organized and staged revolts.¹⁶⁰ However, it was estimated that they would need at least 2,000 Volunteers in Dublin to successfully hold the city center and prevent British reinforcements. Due to MacNeill’s last minute orders in the *Sunday Independent*, only 1,000 men took up arms on Easter Monday, which meant that not only would it be significantly harder to maintain control over the city center, but there would be no feasible way the Volunteers could prevent British reinforcements from entering the city.¹⁶¹

James Connolly and the Irish Citizen Army

A discussion of the Easter Rising would be incomplete without mention of the Irish Citizen Army and James Connolly, an avid Marxist, labor leader, and Irish Nationalist. The Irish Citizen Army (I.C.A.) was originally founded in 1913 as an organization to protect workers on strike from “the brutalities of the R.I.C. and the D.M.P. under the direction of Dublin Castle”,¹⁶² and was closely associated with various Irish workers’ unions. Membership in the I.C.A.

¹⁵⁸ Pearse, *Letters from PH Pearse*. p. 364.

¹⁵⁹ Pearse, *Letters from PH Pearse*. p. 364.

¹⁶⁰ Holt p. 91.

¹⁶¹ Holt p. 91.

¹⁶² BMH WS 586 (Frank Robbins) p. 1.

increased steadily after large strikes broke out in 1913, and there were nearly 1000 members in the I.C.A. at its peak. However, in January 1914 many of the union disputes that drove workers to join the I.C.A. were resolved, and membership quickly dwindled. Shortly afterward, Connolly was appointed Commandant, and quickly turned the I.C.A. into a well-trained and well-disciplined militia.¹⁶³

Unlike those in the I.R.B. or Irish Volunteers, Connolly was openly radical – in terms of both his political and revolutionary views, and wrote extensively for the publications *Worker's Republic* and *Irish Worker*. Connolly's blend of socialism and nationalism came through in his writings, especially when he made statements such as “the Labour movement in Ireland stands for ownership of all Ireland by all the Irish.” However, as one of his colleagues described that:

Although Connolly is considered to have been a communist he was primarily an Irish Republican, although he was naturally always preoccupied with the idea of alleviating the lot of Irish workmen. He often said that the social revolution would never come until we had England off our back.¹⁶⁴

As soon as World War I broke out (over a year before the Easter Rising would occur) Connolly began advocating for an insurrection, stating that “we have waited and now Germany has come, and we will start our own Parliament.”¹⁶⁵ Connolly was also convinced that the British would resort to conscription early in the war, and was at the forefront of the first anti-conscription campaign writing, “we will resist the Militia Ballot Act, or any form of conscription, and we will

¹⁶³ BBC. “Irish Citizen Army” last modified 24 September 2014.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/easterrising/profiles/po14.shtml>

¹⁶⁴ BMH WS 258 (MacDowell) pp. 6-7.

¹⁶⁵ James Connolly, “Speech on War’s Outbreak” in *Irish Worker*. 5 September 1914.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/connolly/>

begin now to prepare our resistance.”¹⁶⁶ For Connolly, that resistance meant “barricades in the streets, guerrilla warfare in the country.”¹⁶⁷

Connolly’s background as a Union leader likely gave him a different perspective than the members of the I.R.B Military Council. Connolly placed far more importance on symbolic actions and political statements, and although under his tutelage the I.C.A. became a much better trained force than the Irish Volunteers, he believed that even his small force of men (the I.C.A. consisted of 219 members at the time of the Easter Rising)¹⁶⁸ could make a significant impact. In one article Connolly wrote that “you [the Irish people] have been told you are not strong, that you have no rifles. Revolutions do not start with rifles; start first and get your rifles later.”¹⁶⁹ This mentality was completely different than that of the I.R.B., which focused on careful and discrete planning. As an example of his commitment to symbolic action, during the Easter Rising, Connolly planned for his men to take Dublin Castle, and then retreat, merely as a show of force and blow to British prestige.¹⁷⁰ Connolly also concerned himself with training highly disciplined and motivated recruits, rather than attempting to swell the ranks of the I.C.A. with sheer numbers. When trying to attract recruits to the I.C.A. Connolly wrote that “we want no parade ground soldiers. We want young men prepared to die for Freedom in Ireland.”¹⁷¹ Connolly was a revolutionary through and through.

The I.C.A. was completely autonomous, and had no direct connection to the I.R.B., Irish Volunteers, Sinn Fein, or any other nationalist organization. Connolly actively disliked both

¹⁶⁶ James Connolly, “The Ballot or the Barricades” in *Irish Worker*. 24 Oct 1914

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/connolly/>

¹⁶⁷ James Connolly, “The Ballot or the Barricades”

¹⁶⁸ *BBC*. “Irish Citizen Army”

¹⁶⁹ James Connolly, “Speech on War’s Outbreak”

¹⁷⁰ *BMH WS 421* (William Oman) p. 3.

¹⁷¹ James Connolly, “The Ballot or the Barricades”

Bulmer Hobson and Eoin MacNeill, and reportedly referred to MacNeill's publication, *The Irish Volunteer*, as "a great wet blanket spread over Ireland every week." Even though Connolly's forces were relatively small in number, they were deeply loyal, and Connolly was prepared to stage an insurrection on his own even if the Irish Volunteers did join. William Oman, one member of the I.C.A. that fought with Connolly during the Rising, reported that

A few weeks prior to the route march [scheduled for Easter Sunday 1916], each member of the Citizen Army had been called in before Commandant Connolly and Commandant Mallin and asked if he was prepared to act without the assistance of the Volunteers.¹⁷²

Oman and the other members of the I.C.A. were convinced that Connolly meant to take Dublin castle on his own, and were prepared to join him even in such a suicidal task. The I.R.B. Military Council also believed Connolly might act alone, and became extremely weary of the I.C.A. in early 1916. The Council had settled on Easter as the date for their insurrection, and was worried that if Connolly rashly launched his own rebellion before the Volunteers had a chance to stage their own, they would lose the element of surprise for the Easter Rising and risk a stronger British presence in Dublin. On January 19, 1916, Connolly disappeared. Commandant Mallin, Connolly's second in command, was convinced that the I.R.B. had kidnapped him, but others in the I.C.A. thought he had been taken by the British.¹⁷³ Although the details of Connolly's disappearance never came to light (and he reappeared after a short time), it is likely he voluntarily attended a meeting with the Military Council of the I.R.B., who decided it was safer to include Connolly in the plan to stage a Rising on Easter Sunday than leave him to his own revolutionary devices.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² BMH WS 421 (William Oman) p 5.

¹⁷³ BMH WS 586 (Frank Robbins) p. 45.

¹⁷⁴ Holt p. 83.

Although the I.C.A. was small, they played a very important part in the Rising due to their strict discipline and superior military training. In preparations for the Rising ammunition and explosives were produced at Liberty Hall in Dublin, the headquarters of the I.C.A.¹⁷⁵ The female members of the I.C.A. were also given first aid training for the 6 months leading up to the Rising, in order to prepare them to act as nurses and care for the wounded.¹⁷⁶ However, women were treated fairly equally within the I.C.A., and were also given arms and allowed to take part in the fighting if they chose (unlike women in the *Cumann na mBan*, who were relegated specifically to support positions).¹⁷⁷ Preparations for the Rising were taken very seriously, and as one member of the I.C.A. described, “at least a week before the Rising we were terribly busy making up knapsacks for the men and also first aid kits, as we had to have so many ready.”¹⁷⁸ Women also began preparing rations for the men as early as Holy Thursday.¹⁷⁹

Furthermore, although scholars often credit Joseph Plunkett with coming up with the rebel’s military strategy for the Easter Rising, Connolly likely played an important role in the planning as well. As far back as July of 1915 Connolly developed strategies for urban combat, and even wrote that “the fortifying of a strong building, as a pivot upon which the defense of a town or village should hinge, forms a principal object of the preparations of any defending force, whether regular army or insurrectionary.”¹⁸⁰ This strategy was at the heart of the Military Council’s plan during the Easter Rising, as they first seized the Dublin General Post Office (G.P.O.), and utilized that as both their headquarters and the center of their defensive perimeter.

¹⁷⁵ BMH WS 546 (Rose Hackett) p. 2.

¹⁷⁶ BMH WS 546 (Rose Hackett) p. 3.

¹⁷⁷ BMH WS 258 (MacDowell) p. 8.

¹⁷⁸ BMH WS 546 (Rose Hackett) p. 3.

¹⁷⁹ BMH WS 546 (Rose Hackett) p. 3.

¹⁸⁰ James Connolly, “Street Fighting – Summary” in *Worker’s Republic*. 24 July 1915.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/connolly/>

The Rising

Despite MacNeill's attempt to thwart the insurrection, Pearse ordered the Volunteers to assemble at 10:00 a.m. Monday morning, and Connolly had kept the majority of his men assembled at Liberty Hall throughout the night after insisting on carrying out their planned route march through Dublin on Easter Sunday.¹⁸¹ Upon receiving this news from a friend, Desmond FitzGerald rushed to O'Rahilly's house to inform him the Rising was about to begin, while his friend went to contact MacNeill. Although O'Rahilly, had followed MacNeill's orders and therefore attempted to prevent the Rising, upon learning it was still on he reportedly laughed and remarked, "If men are determined to have a Rising nothing will stop them."¹⁸²

Meanwhile, sometime shortly after 10 o'clock in the morning, a group of Volunteers and I.C.A. men, led by Connolly, stormed the Dublin G.P.O., easily taking control of it and establishing it as their base of operations.¹⁸³ However, once the G.P.O. was taken, "there was great confusion everywhere,"¹⁸⁴ with many of the G.P.O. staff and occupants shocked that the Volunteers had actually launched a rebellion.¹⁸⁵ Shortly after the G.P.O. was occupied, "Volunteers were stationed all around the top of the building," and windows were smashed to allow Volunteers to take up firing positions from the top floors.¹⁸⁶ The G.P.O. quickly became a rallying point for Volunteers who missed their assembly points in the morning, or who initially failed to mobilize due to MacNeill's last minute counter orders the day before, and the number of

¹⁸¹ BMH WS 421 (William Oman) p. 5.

¹⁸² FitzGerald p. 127.

¹⁸³ Holt p. 92.

¹⁸⁴ BMH WS 1765 (Seán T. O'Kelly) p. 241.

¹⁸⁵ Townshend, *Easter 1916*, p. 158.

¹⁸⁶ BMH WS 1765 (Seán T. O'Kelly) p. 2.41

Volunteers occupying the G.P.O quickly increased.¹⁸⁷ Even though the leaders of the Rising purposefully decided to leave O’Rahilly ignorant of their plans, and he had dutifully carried MacNeill’s orders around the countryside the previous day, he soon turned up at the G.P.O. to join Pearse and the others. Desmond FitzGerald marveled at O’Rahilly’s patriotism, and wrote:

They [the I.R.B. Military Council] had doubted if O’Rahilly really meant to come out and risk his life, and they now saw that in the service to which he was so devoted he was not only ready to give his life but to give it under the command of those whose action had imposed upon him a mortal insult.¹⁸⁸

Most of the members on the I.R.B. Military Council were present at the G.P.O. as well, including Pearse, Connolly, Clarke, MacDermott, and Plunkett, who all arrived shortly after it was taken.

At 12:45 p.m., the proclamation of the Irish Republic, issued by the new Provisional Government, was read aloud by Pearse:

IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives the old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.

Having organized her manhood through her secret revolutionary organization, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and through her open military organizations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself, she now seizes that moment, and supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe, but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory.

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty; six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms. Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades in arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare and of its exaltation among the nations. The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious

¹⁸⁷ Townshend, *Easter 1916*, p. 158.

¹⁸⁸ FitzGerald p. 133.

and civil liberty; equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and all of its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien Government, which has divided a minority from the majority in the past.

Until our arms have brought the opportune moment for the establishment of a permanent National Government, representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrages of all her men and women, the Provisional Government, hereby constituted, will administer the civil and military affairs of the Republic in trust for the people.

We place the cause of the Irish Republic under the protection of the Most High God, Whose blessing we invoke upon our arms, and we pray that no one who serves the cause will dishonour it by cowardice, inhumanity, or rapine. In this supreme hour the Irish nation must, by its valour and discipline, and by the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the august destiny to which it is called.

Signed on behalf of the Provisional Government: Thomas J Clarke, Sean Mac Diarmada, P.H. Pearse, James Connolly, Thomas Mac Donagh, Eamonn Ceannt, Joseph Plunkett.¹⁸⁹

The proclamation itself is a magnificent document that touches upon Irish history, notions of self-determination, and even women's suffrage (several years before the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was passed).

While the leadership was organizing in the G.P.O., various units of the Volunteers and I.C.A. were sent out to occupy strategic positions around the city. Connolly's second in command, Commandant Mallin, along with the notable Countess Markievicz, took a large group of the I.C.A. to occupy St. Stephen's Green.¹⁹⁰ The men at St. Stephens quickly removed members of the public from the park and began entrenching themselves and establishing a defensive perimeter.¹⁹¹ MacDonagh and his men were sent to occupy Jacob's Biscuit Factory on Bishop Street, Edward Daly occupied the Four Courts, and Eamonn Ceannt (along with his

¹⁸⁹ Pearse, *Letters from PH Pearse*. pp. 365-366.

¹⁹⁰ Holt p. 95.

¹⁹¹ "ST. STEPHEN'S GREEN." *The Irish Times (1874-1920)*, Apr 25, 1916.

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/516407009?accountid=9673>.

second in command, Cathal Brugha) took the South Dublin Union.¹⁹² Although there was fighting throughout the day, the British reinforcements did not arrive outside the city until Tuesday morning, and throughout Monday the rebels all held their positions.

Starting on Tuesday the situation for the Volunteers deteriorated. Pearse and the other members of the Military Council were counting on Volunteer companies to rise up throughout the country, and believed that if there were risings in cities all across Ireland they would have a real chance at achieving victory against the British.¹⁹³ However, due to unresolved logistical issues and MacNeill's countermanding orders, revolts did not break out across the country. Michael Brennan, an officer in the Claire Volunteers, wrote that even before MacNeill sent his countermanding orders, there was confusion regarding his company's role during the Rising:

When I got these instructions they were so vague as to be incomprehensible. They amounted, in effect, to an order to mobilize on Sunday and to hold the roads leading into Limerick from Claire. My total armament was about thirty shotguns, one service rifle, two or three .22 rifles, about two revolvers and a few hundred rounds of ammunition. There were five or six roads spread across about five miles of country and I couldn't even learn in what direction I was supposed to face – whether I was to prevent people getting in or getting out.¹⁹⁴

Even if there was no confusion, it seems ludicrous that a single company of Volunteers, having at most 4 rifles, would be tasked with preventing British movements over such a large area. However, to add even more confusion to the situation, Brennan wrote that once Pearse's order arrived on Monday, stating the Rising was still on, "the whole controversy turned on who was entitled to give the orders – MacNeill or Pearse."¹⁹⁵ The controversy was not settled quickly, and as late as Tuesday, while Pearse and his men were still battling in Dublin, the Claire Volunteers

¹⁹² Holt p. 95.

¹⁹³ Pearse, *Letters from PH Pearse* p. 372.

¹⁹⁴ Brennan pp 13-14.

¹⁹⁵ Brennan p. 15.

were still debating who to support.¹⁹⁶ In other areas of the country, such as in Cork, the Volunteers were simply dismissed on Sunday, and were not ordered to reassemble.¹⁹⁷

In Dublin, the Volunteers held out against British advances for five days. On Wednesday, Pearse sent a letter to his mother in which he stated that the men were “all in excellent spirits, though very sleepy.”¹⁹⁸ However, it is likely by Wednesday Pearse already knew the battle for Dublin was unwinnable, as he also included in the letter that “the men have fought with wonderful courage and gaiety, and *whatever happens to us*, the name of Dublin will be splendid in history forever.”¹⁹⁹ Earlier on Wednesday, Liberty Hall, the headquarters of the I.C.A., had been bombarded from a British Naval vessel, and although the garrison was able to escape, the building was completely destroyed.²⁰⁰ On Thursday Connolly was gravely wounded, and on Friday Evening the G.P.O. caught fire, forcing those inside to evacuate and break into houses along Moore Street.²⁰¹ While leading men up Moore Street, O’Rahilly was gunned down by the British forces,²⁰² and many provisions (including most of the Volunteer’s food) were lost with the G.P.O.

Early in the week it was easy for the Volunteers to hold out hope for a victory. Desmond FitzGerald reported that Monday evening there was a rumor circulating throughout the G.P.O. that the Germans had landed a sizable force not far from Dublin. FitzGerald wrote that “this information was accepted as a certainty” among the men, and added that even Pearse and Plunkett talked about what might become of Ireland if the Germans defeated the British in the

¹⁹⁶ Brennan p. 16.

¹⁹⁷ BMH WS 59 (Con Ahern) p. 4.

¹⁹⁸ Pearse, *Letters from PH Pearse*. p. 369.

¹⁹⁹ Pearse, *Letters from PH Pearse*. p. 369. My Italics

²⁰⁰ "BOMBARDMENT OF LIBERTY HALL." *The Irish Times (1874-1920)*: 2. Apr 28 1916.*ProQuest*. Web. 29 Feb. 2016.

²⁰¹ Pearse, *Letters from PH Pearse*. p. 376.

²⁰² Pearse, *Letters from PH Pearse*. p. 373.

war.²⁰³ However, FitzGerald also reported that he “noticed a marked collapse in the general optimism” on either Wednesday or Thursday evening.²⁰⁴ By Friday, with both the G.P.O. and Liberty Hall destroyed, Connolly wounded, O’Rahilly dead, the surviving Volunteers in Dublin surrounded, and no successful insurrection anywhere else, there was simply no cause for hope.

It becomes clear in Pearse’s writings on Friday that he himself no longer believed the Volunteers could be successful. In a manifesto issued that day, Pearse wrote that even if the Volunteers did not win victory in battle, “they may win in it death.”²⁰⁵ On Saturday, the leaders of the Rising met, and although the decision was not unanimous, it was decided to negotiate terms of surrender with the British. According to Pearse, they felt that their insurrection was already significant enough to “to gain recognition of Ireland’s national claim at an international peace conference” that would inevitably take place at the war’s end.²⁰⁶ Furthermore, recognizing that their situation was unwinnable, the leaders of the Rising wanted to “prevent the further slaughter of the civil population” and try and save the lives of as many Volunteers as possible.²⁰⁷ Pearse and the others knew that upon their surrender they would most likely be executed, and in a fair well letter to his mother wrote that, “our hope and belief is that the Government will spare the lives of all our followers, but we do not expect that they will spare the lives of the leaders.”²⁰⁸

Pearse’s prediction was soon proved true, as he, Thomas MacDonagh, and Tom Clarke were the first to be executed on May 3. The following day Joseph Plunkett, Edward Daly, and William Pearse (Patrick Henry Pearse’s brother) were shot. In a famous episode, Plunkett was given special permission to wed his fiancée, Grace Gifford (who happened to be MacDonagh’s

²⁰³ FitzGerald p. 134 and FitzGerald p. 141.

²⁰⁴ FitzGerald p. 145.

²⁰⁵ Pearse, *Letters from PH Pearse*. p. 372.

²⁰⁶ Pearse, *Letters from PH Pearse*. p. 373.

²⁰⁷ Pearse, *Letters from PH Pearse*. p. 375.

²⁰⁸ Pearse, *Letters from PH Pearse*. p. 377.

sister-in-law) the night before his execution.²⁰⁹ Michael Mallin and Eamonn Ceannt were executed on May 8, and James Connolly (who was still gravely wounded) and Sean MacDermott were the last of the I.R.B. conspirators to be executed on May 12. Casement, who had been imprisoned in England since his arrest, was executed on August 3. In total, 16 people (including Casement) were executed for their role in the Rising.²¹⁰

Within the city of Dublin there was considerable damage, estimated at roughly £2.5 million,²¹¹ and a fair number of both civilian and military casualties. The *Irish Times* reported that 124 British military personnel (including 12 members of the R.I.C. and 3 members of the D.M.P.) were killed, and 388 were wounded.²¹² Although the *Irish Times* admitted its civilian estimates were “only approximate,” they calculated the civilian death toll to be around 160.²¹³ Since many of the fighters were spread throughout the city, sometimes hidden within houses, some were able to ditch their weapons and uniforms in order to escape capture and flee Dublin. However, many willingly laid down their arms and were taken into custody by the British.

Role of Catholic Church in the Easter Rising and Volunteer Movement

Although there were a significant number of Protestants involved in the nationalist movement, some prominent members of the Catholic clergy actively supported the Volunteer movement and promoted Irish Nationalism. However, the extent to which the Church as an

²⁰⁹ "CONDEMNED REBEL'S MARRIAGE." *Weekly Irish Times (1876-1920)*: 7. Apr 29 1916. *ProQuest*. Web. 29 Feb. 2016.

²¹⁰ Holt p. 120.

²¹¹ Townshend, *Easter 1916*. p. 266.

²¹² "THE DEATH ROLL." *The Irish Times (1874-1920)*: 4. May 06 1916. *ProQuest*. Web. 29 Feb. 2016.

²¹³ "THE DEATH ROLL." *The Irish Times*.

institution supported the Volunteers, or how Church involvement in the movement impacted the actions of the Volunteers, is both complicated and open to interpretation. The Reverend Monsignor Michael Curran, who served as the personal secretary to the Archbishop of Dublin from 1906 to 1919, discussed the Archbishop's attitude towards and involvement with the nationalist movement in much detail. Curran described that:

The Archbishop did not welcome the establishment of the Volunteers at the beginning. In fact he disapproved, but as events developed he realized there was full justification for their formation since the arms of the Ulster Volunteers frightened and coerced the weak English government.²¹⁴

Although the Archbishop was well versed in the writings of Griffith, he expressed sentiments of sympathy with the Irish Nationalist cause, and was likely sympathetic to German involvement in the Republican struggle,²¹⁵ Curran reports that “the Archbishop had no belief in Eoin MacNeill as a political and much less as a revolutionary leader.”²¹⁶ Despite the Archbishop's personal opinions, Curran makes it clear that the Archbishop felt he was under no obligation to interfere in the Volunteer's activities. One of the few concrete actions the Archbishop took before the Rising was to sternly refuse the British Military's request to place recruiting posters “on the railings of Catholic Churches in Dublin.”²¹⁷ However this was certainly not a neutral act, since Volunteer companies frequently requested money for the Defense of Ireland Fund or for the purchase of arms and ammunition at Catholic services or outside Catholic churches.

Furthermore, the Archbishop and several members of the clergy were made aware of the Volunteer's plans for a Rising before Easter Monday, yet made no action to prevent it. Curran reported that on Holy Saturday, two days before the Rising, one “well known and much

²¹⁴ BMH WS 687 (Michael Curran) p. 9.

²¹⁵ BMH WS 687 (Michael Curran) p. 12.

²¹⁶ BMH WS 687 (Michael Curran) p. 9.

²¹⁷ BMH WS 687 (Michael Curran) p. 13.

esteemed” officer in the Volunteers, whose identity he kept secret, informed a Catholic priest of the Volunteer’s plans in order to ask his opinion on the matter and “satisfy his conscience.”²¹⁸

The Priest who was consulted informed Reverend Curran, who although admitted he did not at the time believe the leaders of the Volunteers would seriously carry out a Rising,²¹⁹ informed the Archbishop who once again refused to interfere.²²⁰

Not only was the Archbishop made aware of the Rising before it occurred, but Count Plunkett (the father of Joseph Plunkett) traveled to Rome before the Rising in order to inform Pope Benedict XV of the Volunteer’s plans. Count Plunkett’s daughter wrote that she was certain he was sent by those on the Military Council of the I.R.B., and described that:

His main objective was to counteract the statement of the British Envoy to the Vatican, that the Irish were completely satisfied that they were democratically represented by John Redmond, and had accepted Home Rule as a settlement of the Irish question, and that the Volunteers had no moral justification, and should be accordingly condemned by the Church.²²¹

Curran recounts that around noon on Easter Monday he was visited by Plunkett looking to see the Archbishop, who was ill and in bed. When he realized the Archbishop was unavailable, Plunkett told Curran that the Rising was about to begin, and “that he had been to see the Pope and that he had informed Benedict XV of the whole Irish Situation and the Intended Insurrection.”²²² Count Plunkett then recounted the details of his meeting with the Pope to Curran, who reported:

At the end of his discussion, he asked the Pope’s Blessing for the Volunteers. According to him [Plunkett], the Pope showed great perturbation and asked was there no peaceful way out of the difficulty; that the news was extremely grave,

²¹⁸ BMH WS 687 (Michael Curran) p. 32.

²¹⁹ BMH WS 687 (Michael Curran) p. 33.

²²⁰ BMH WS 687 (Michael Curran) p. 36.

²²¹ BMH WS 358 (Geraldine Dillon)p. 11

²²² BMH WS 687 (Michael Curran) p. 38.

and asked had be seen the Archbishop of Dublin. [After more conversation] all the Pope could do was to express his profound anxiety and how much the news disturbed him, and asked could their object not be achieved in any other ways, and counselled him to see the Archbishop.²²³

Although according to Curran the Pope did express concern regarding the Volunteer's plan to stage an armed Rebellion, he never expressly forbids it. Interestingly, according to this account (which Curran states was later corroborated by a letter he received from another Vatican official who witnessed Plunkett have a private audience with the Pope) the Pope recommended consulting the Archbishop of Dublin not once, but twice, even though the Pope Benedict XV outranked him. It seems that Pope Benedict XV was more interested in placing the burden of whether or not to forbid the Rising on someone else, since he could have easily just told Count Plunkett that he did not support it.

Although both the Archbishop of Dublin and Pope Benedict XV effectively remained neutral leading up to and during the conflict, other members of the Clergy in Ireland took a much more active and vocal approach aiding the Republican cause. Dr. O'Dwyer, the Bishop of Limerick, was well known for being an ardent supporter of both the Republican movement and the Irish Volunteers. An associate of Bishop O'Dwyer, the Reverend Thomas J. Lavin, wrote that "Dr. O'Dwyer first came into prominence as a nationalist in 1915" when he vehemently and vocally began opposing British Military recruiting in Ireland.²²⁴ Bishop O'Dwyer became even more notable when after the Rising he openly (in letters published in the press) scorned the British occupation of Ireland and Sir John Maxwell, the General in charge of the British armed forces. Maxwell wrote to Bishop O'Dwyer, charging two Limerick Priests, Father Wall and Father Hayes, with actively supporting the rebels. According to Lavin:

²²³ BMH WS 687 (Michael Curran) p. 38.

²²⁴ BMH WS 1407 (Thomas Lavin) p. 3.

One of the priests had spoken against conscription, had blessed the colours of the Irish Volunteers, had attended lectures by P.H. Pearse; the other had appealed to all members of the G.A.A. to join the Volunteers, has shown disrespect to the King, and had inspired disloyalty in the people by his public approval of Sinn Féin.²²⁵

Maxwell informed Bishop O'Dwyer that "had these priests been laymen, they would have already been placed under arrest," and requested that he move the two priests from any position that would allow them to have contact with the Irish people.²²⁶ In response, Bishop O'Dwyer told Maxwell that the two clergymen had broken no laws that he knew of, either "civil or ecclesiastical," and responded:

In your letter of 6th inst. you appeal to me to help you in the furtherance of your work as military dictator of Ireland. Even if your action of that kind was not outside my province, the events of the past few weeks would make it impossible for me to have any part in proceedings which I regard as wantonly cruel and oppressive. [...] You took care that no plea for mercy should interpose on behalf of the poor young fellows who surrendered to you in Dublin. The first information which we got of their fate was the announcement that they had been shot in cold blood.²²⁷

To finish his letter, which was read by many once it was published in the *Irish Times*, Bishop O'Dwyer concluded that "altogether your régime has been one of the worst and blackest chapters in the history of the misgovernment of this country."²²⁸ It is hard to imagine a more openly hostile position a high ranking member of the clergy could take, and Bishop O'Dwyer's use of phrases such as "this country" make his appeal to Irish Nationalism quite clear.

After his correspondences with Maxwell were published, Bishop O'Dwyer continued to issue statements to the press and give anti-British speeches in Limerick. In August of 1916, Bishop O'Dwyer gave a speech recorded in the *Irish Times*, which was in response to

²²⁵ BMH WS 1407 (Thomas Lavin) p. 4.

²²⁶ Edward Thomas. "BISHOP O'DWYER AND SIR JOHN MAXWELL." *The Irish Times (1874-1920)*: 6. May 31 1916. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 Feb. 2016 .

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

educational pamphlets on patriotism which the British authorities began distributing in Irish schools. Bishop O'Dwyer told his audience that:

Recent events in Dublin, the perfidy of the English Government on Home Rule, the dishonesty with which we were promised self-government as a consideration for supporting England in the war, so that our people were led to believe that in reality it was a war for Ireland, all that and a thousand other phases of the duplicity which has just been revealed in Parliament, have put the Irish people in a temper that will not brook the trifling of England's retainers, or accept lessons on Patriotism from them.²²⁹

Until his death in August of 1917, Bishop O'Dwyer continued to openly support the Republican movement and criticize the British occupation of Ireland, specifically the treatment of Irish prisoners being held in English jails.²³⁰ Although he was perhaps the most famous Bishop supporting the Volunteers, the Bishop of Galway, Dr. O'Dea, was also known to have been a supporter of the Republican movement. Bishop O'Dea even gave his approval to the actions of one Galway priest, Father Feeney, who actively participated with his company of the Volunteers during the Rising (though Feeney was later forced into temporary political exile in America).²³¹

Although some members of the clergy quite actively aided the Volunteers, it seems doubtful there was any sort of official stance by either the individual clergy or Catholic Church. Even Father Wall, one of those accused by Maxwell of aiding the rebels, was reported to have encouraged one company of Limerick Volunteers to turn in their weapons after the Rising. Timothy O'Shea described that:

Some days after the surrender in Dublin, Fr. Wall called a meeting of the Volunteers. He advised us to surrender our arms to the R.I.C. in the local

²²⁹ "THE TEACHING OF PATRIOTISM." *The Irish Times (1874-1920)*: 7. Aug 07 1916. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 Feb. 2016 .

²³⁰ BMH WS 1407 (Thomas Lavin) p. 7.

²³¹ BMH WS 383 (Thomas Fahy) p. 2 and BMH WS 617 (Bridget Malone) pp. 5-6.

barracks. Next day, headed by Fr. Wall, we marched in a body to the barracks and handed in about a dozen guns, including some shot guns.²³²

Clearly even those priests who encouraged participation in the Volunteers did not openly encourage wanton bloodshed. Though the fact that Father Wall had such influence among his company of Volunteers demonstrates how important members of the clergy could be.

Furthermore, some members of the clergy were entirely unsympathetic to the Volunteer movement. Richard Walsh, who was arrested by the British for his role in smuggling arms, wrote that while he was imprisoned was approached by a priest (serving as a British Army Chaplin) who attempted to persuade him to hand over the weapons, which were hidden with some of his fellow Volunteers. Walsh wrote that at times the priest became agitated with him, and “brought every pressure possible to bear on us to hand over the rifles unconditionally.”²³³

Although Catholic Priests working directly with the British seem to be a rarity, in Curran’s detailed account of the Rising he admits that some priests he addressed in the cathedral were anxious of the Rising, and explains that he described Count Plunkett’s meeting with the Pope to them “partially because [he] knew one or two of them were not friendly” to the Volunteer’s cause.²³⁴ Although there were clearly Catholic Priests who supported the Irish Volunteers, it was an individual decision, and even if the Archbishop of Dublin was sympathetic to the Volunteer’s cause, no formal position was ever adopted by the clergy’s hierarchy.

²³² BMH WS 1213 (Timothy O’Shea) p. 2.

²³³ BMH WS 400 (Richard Walsh) p. 16.

²³⁴ BMH WS 687 (Michael Curran) p. 43.

The Age Old Struggle

The Irish Volunteers who participated in the Easter Rising encountered the same age old problem as their forefathers. Although Pearse believed that the rest of the Volunteers would rise up elsewhere around the country while the city of Dublin was under siege, he was mistaken. Once again an Irish rebellion failed because only a small force of Irishman attempted to take on the great might of the British Empire, and although the Volunteers of Dublin fought valiantly, it was inevitable that without outside support they would be defeated. However, public perception of the Volunteers would soon take a drastic turn. Many people agreed with Bishop O'Dwyer's assessment of Maxwell's rule in the aftermath of the Rising, and even those who were not initially supportive of the Rising were shocked at the brutal expediency in which the executions of its leaders were carried out.

4. An Orgy of Terror and Destruction

Internment in Prison Camps

After Pearse's unconditional surrender in Dublin, Volunteer companies all around the city began to lay down their arms and allow the British forces (be it the R.I.C., D.M.P, or Military) to take them into custody. Although some of the insurgents, like Desmond FitzGerald, managed to escape by ditching their weapons and uniform in order to blend in with the general population,²³⁵ many others willingly subjected themselves to capture. Joseph Lawless, who was a member of a Volunteer company located a short distance outside Dublin during the Rising, described that after Pearse's order to surrender arrived their Company's officers contacted the R.I.C. in order to inform them they were held out in an old farmhouse. While the Volunteers were waiting for the R.I.C. to arrive, Lawless and one of his comrades considered fleeing to the countryside with their supplies and arms. However, according to Lawless he was persuaded against doing so by his father:

He opened by saying that of course we could do as we pleased, but should remember that we as a body had given an implied bond in our formal surrender, and that if we hoped to be treated by the enemy as honorable foes, we must honor our word by, initially at any rate, placing ourselves at their disposal.²³⁶

The Volunteers genuinely considered themselves prisoners of war, rather than captured rebels or criminals, which would become a major point of contention between interned Volunteers and the British authorities. Lawless described that while being escorted to a British prison:

Almost the whole way along he [a British soldier] cursed us fervently and went into all the gory details of what he would like to do to us if he had his way. "Here I am" said he, "having come safely through two blanket years in the blanket

²³⁵ FitzGerald p. 165.

²³⁶ BMH WS 1043 (Joseph Lawless) p. 128.

trenches in France, come here for a blankety rest, and then run the chance of getting a blankety bullet from a lot of blank-blank-blanks like you,” and so on, ad nauseam.²³⁷

Furthermore, Lawless noted that a few months later, when he complained about the conditions in Knutsford prison, the prison guards simply replied that the interned Volunteers were “a damn sight better off than the chaps in the trenches in Flanders.”²³⁸ From the perspective of many British soldiers, the Volunteers were traitors, who attempted to stab the British Empire in the back while its valiant soldiers fought for the survival of the Empire in the trenches of Europe. The fact that the leadership of the I.R.B. was actively working with the Germans only reinforced that belief.

Both in Dublin and in the countryside, men destroyed their rifles or hid their equipment before being arrested by the British. Lawless described this as “a reaction equivalent to the old custom of breaking the sword before handing it over.”²³⁹ When the R.I.C. arrived the names and addresses of the Volunteers were recorded,²⁴⁰ and the Volunteers who surrendered were soon escorted by the British military to ships, sometimes cattle boats,²⁴¹ and taken to either prisons or internment camps in England.

Overall, the conditions in the internment camps were not terribly harsh. Lawless and his comrades were first taken to Knutsford Prison, where they were kept in normal prison cells.²⁴² There Lawless claimed that the Volunteers were given only enough food to barely sustain them, and were prevented from congregating or socializing together. However, after several months the

²³⁷ BMH WS 1043 (Joseph Lawless) p. 131.

²³⁸ BMH WS 1043 (Joseph Lawless) p. 151.

²³⁹ BMH WS 1043 (Joseph Lawless) p. 129.

²⁴⁰ BMH WS 1043 (Joseph Lawless) p. 129.

²⁴¹ BMH WS 308 (Seamus Murray) p. 4.

²⁴² BMH WS 1043 (Joseph Lawless) p. 149.

British Government relaxed many of the restrictions, and the interned Volunteers were allowed to receive packages and assemble together. Once that occurred:

New friendships were formed and old ones cemented [in Knutsford], and later in Frongoch, which formed the basis of the new revolutionary movement that grew rapidly in Ireland when we had regained our personal liberty by the amnesty granted at the following Christmas.²⁴³

After a time, Lawless and the Volunteers kept at Knutsford prison were transferred to Frongoch, where many prominent Volunteers (such as Sean T. O’Kelly, Ernest Blythe, Michael Collins, and many others) were held.

According to William O’Brien, who wrote about his experiences at Frongoch, “the conditions on the whole were not bad.”²⁴⁴ The prisoners were required to take care of their own cooking and cleaning, and generally ran things within the camp.²⁴⁵ They also organized concerts in the dining hall, and competitions on the athletic field, all the while maintaining close contact with their friends, family, and comrades back in Ireland.²⁴⁶ Frongoch was not the only camp where Volunteers were kept at, but even in other places conditions were reported to be similar. However, while conditions within the camps were generally acceptable, the British tightened their control and heightened their military presence back in Ireland.

As Lawless described, “the Rising had not the support of one-twentieth of the people of Ireland when it began.”²⁴⁷ During the Rising itself mobs of Dubliners chased insurgents down, or tried to aid the British military in capturing them.²⁴⁸ A few members of unionist militia groups even fought alongside the British forces during the rising, and while the Volunteers who did

²⁴³ BMH WS 1043 (Joseph Lawless) p. 162.

²⁴⁴ BMH WS 1766 (William O’Brien) p. 29.

²⁴⁵ BMH WS 1766 (William O’Brien) p. 39.

²⁴⁶ BMH WS 1043 (Joseph Lawless) p. 183 and p. 190.

²⁴⁷ BMH WS 1043 (Joseph Lawless) p. 119.

²⁴⁸ BMH WS 546 (Rose Hackett) pp. 6-7.

surrender after the Rising were being taken away by British forces many women, especially the wives of those serving in the British military, were extremely hostile to towards them.²⁴⁹

Although the Easter Rising of 1916 was not a popular revolt, it allowed the Volunteers a vital opportunity to cement themselves as a power in Ireland. They gained the support of the people after their leaders were executed and they were imprisoned, and the British made the fatal error of keeping them interned in camps together, which allowed them to analyze their past actions and continue to plan for the future. This period of introspection would eventually lead to the Volunteer's reorganization as the Irish Republican Army (or I.R.A.). As Edgar Holt, a scholar of Irish history so eloquently described, after the Volunteer's internment "instead of professors, poets, school masters, and trade-union organizers, the leaders of Ireland's protest were young men who made revolution their whole and only career."²⁵⁰

Regrouping and Reorganizing

After the failed Easter Rising there was relatively little violence until the end of 1918.²⁵¹ However, during that period the Sinn Fein political party became increasingly popular, and the British were met with increasing hostility. Many of the prisoners taken during the Easter Rising continued making plans and training even while interned in British prison camps.²⁵² These men certainly had not given up the fight, and when released from the prison camps in 1917, many joined the Sinn Fein Party and rejoined or reorganized their old Volunteer companies. Sinn Fein

²⁴⁹ BMH WS 194 (Domhall O Buchalla) p. 8.

²⁵⁰ Holt p. 123.

²⁵¹ William Kautt, *The Anglo-Irish War*. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999) p. 70

²⁵² Kautt p. 64.

actually had relatively little to do with the Easter Rising itself,²⁵³ but was soon appropriated by the Irish Volunteers. Sinn Fein's message began to radicalize, eventually calling for an end of the British foreign invasion in the sovereign nation of Ireland.²⁵⁴ During this period even the Catholic Church began openly allying itself with the revitalized Sinn Fein, started vigorously opposing the policy of conscription, to the extent that some parishes even read a pledge of disobedience to the British Crown at every mass.²⁵⁵

One of the first tasks of the Irish Volunteers was to rearm itself, since many weapons were either destroyed or seized by the British after the Easter Rising, and many companies had very few weapons when they reorganized.²⁵⁶ To do this, companies of Irish Volunteers organized raids to search people's homes, especially those of British officers, ex-military, or loyalists, in order to seize arms.²⁵⁷ However, even those sympathetic to the Republican movement often had their weapons stolen, and as one Volunteer described, "the majority of the guns taken were obsolete."²⁵⁸ Training progressed similarly as it did before the Easter Rising, with drills, lectures on tactics and the use of arms, etc. However, the Volunteers were no longer permitted to parade in the streets, and all training had to be done in secret.²⁵⁹

The threat of conscription into the British Army appalled many Irishmen, even among those who previously had been apathetic to the Republican movement. Ireland had been spared from the first act of conscription during the Great War, but as the war dragged on and the British became desperate for fresh recruits, the British Government began to contemplate expanding

²⁵³ Kautt p. 66.

²⁵⁴ Kautt p. 67.

²⁵⁵ Kautt pp 66-67.

²⁵⁶ Kautt p. 65. And BMH WS 434 (Charles Dalton) p. 13.

²⁵⁷ BMH WS 1021 (Amos Reidy) p. 7.

²⁵⁸ BMH WS 667 (Patrick Lawson) p. 3.

²⁵⁹ BMH WS 1021 (Amos Reidy) p. 4.

their policy of conscription to include Ireland, which had a significant, albeit temporary, effect on the Volunteers. Patrick Clifford, a member of the Irish Volunteers, wrote that:

During the conscription scare in 1918 large numbers joined the company, and the strength increased to about 150 at one stage. Many of those who joined at that time took no further part in the movement when the conscription scare had passed and the strength of the unit fell to about 60.²⁶⁰

Before the scare his Mitchelstown Company numbered around only 40 men, meaning over 100 men in the Mitchelstown area joined the Volunteers simply because they opposed conscription. Clifford was not the only one to report large spikes in membership, and other companies reported that their membership topped 100 during this period,²⁶¹ which would have been unheard of in the months before. Although many of the men left once the threat of conscription was over, the increased support for both the Volunteers and Sinn Fein helped pave the way to their expedient recovery.

The situation became even more complicated when those elected to parliament under the Sinn Fein banner decided to form their own parliamentary body in Dublin, rather than travel to Westminster and take the seats in the British Parliament. On January 21, 1919, the *Dáil Eireann*, or Irish Parliament, first met in Dublin, even though 34 of the 73 elected members remained in British custody.²⁶² To support the new provisional government, some members of the Irish Volunteers began selling bonds to support the Dáil.²⁶³ The Fianna even changed its oath, making young boys pledge “allegiance to the Irish Republic,” rather than pledge “to work for the independence of Ireland.”²⁶⁴

²⁶⁰ BMH WS 946 (Patrick Clifford) p. 1.

²⁶¹ BMH WS 1021 (Amos Reidy) p. 3.

²⁶² Kautt p. 70.

²⁶³ BMH WS 1021 (Amos Reidy) p. 3.

²⁶⁴ BMH WS 191 (Joseph Reynolds) p. 1.

As discontent with the British increased, there was also a rise of violence against both the R.I.C. and British forces. Soon the Irish Volunteers were reorganized under the banner of the Dáil, and became known as the Irish Republican Army. The I.R.A. rapidly began utilizing a strategy of both urban and rural guerrilla warfare, ambushing British patrols, stealing British supplies or intelligence, and assassinating key British officers and officials. A complicated system of intelligence gathering and counterintelligence developed on both sides that saw many executed for espionage or killed in the line of duty. In such a volatile situation reprisal killings became common place, and many people were killed before a treaty was finally signed.

Guerrilla Tactics

Shortly after the Easter Rising, Irish membership in the R.I.C. began to drastically decrease, as few Irish would join and there was a sharp increase in resignations.²⁶⁵ Many were shocked by the violence in Dublin during the Rising, and the Sinn Fein party organized a boycott of everything having to do with the police – even to the extreme that undertakers would refuse to handle the bodies of deceased R.I.C. men.²⁶⁶ In response, the British were forced to bring in English soldiers and auxiliaries, many of whom were veterans of World War I.²⁶⁷ The British also recruited men to the reserve of the R.I.C., who were referred to as either “Black and Tans” or simply “Tans.” The Black and Tans quickly became known for their brutality, and were frequent targets of the Irish Republican Army. Starting in early 1919, after the establishment of

²⁶⁵ Peter Hart. *The IRA at War*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). p. 4.

²⁶⁶ Hart p. 5.

²⁶⁷ Hart p. 4.

the Dáil Eireann, violence between members of the I.R.A. and British forces broke out, and guerrilla warfare pitted the I.R.A. against the British forces in Ireland.

Both sides of the conflict utilized what could be considered terrorist tactics, although they usually targeted military personnel or insurgents – not civilians. Regardless, these tactics were aimed at inciting fear and destroying either English or Irish morale. Vincent Rice, a Dublin Lawyer, wrote that “far and beyond any yea or nay, the British Government under Lloyd George had settled on a policy of murder, arson, looting, and armed terrorism of the civil population in Ireland in order to suppress the insurrection movement.”²⁶⁸ Although there are many reports of British soldiers behaving in such a manner, the I.R.A. utilized very similar tactics. In one example, the I.R.A. determined where several British officers were boarding, and in the dead of night broke into the house and shot the officers while still in their beds. As one I.R.A. operative who was working undercover in Dublin Castle wrote following the incident, “in the Castle, pandemonium reigned. An officer, whose pals had been wiped out, shot himself in his room. The tragedy was hushed up.”²⁶⁹ Furthermore, he continued that, “a long string of cars and baggage choked the Castle gate all day. Officers, Secret Service men and their wives were flying to protection and a room could not be found in the Castle for love nor money.”²⁷⁰

The British forces in Ireland were forced to be in a constant state of alert, as the I.R.A. would strike at any time – whether they were on a patrol in the countryside or walking down the streets of Dublin. One member of the Dublin brigade, Joseph Byrne, described that for ambushes within the city the company would be split up into small groups of men. Byrne wrote that:

²⁶⁸ BMH WS 843 (Vincent Rice) p. 1.

²⁶⁹ BMH WS 380 (David Neligan) p. 12.

²⁷⁰ BMH WS 380 (David Neligan) p. 12.

The method was to have a scout in front of us patrolling, to report back any approach of lorries or tenders. Only about six of us took part actually in this type of operation and we worked with groups of two on each side of the street. [...] As the military came within range we attacked with grenades.²⁷¹

Members of the Dublin brigade would go out nearly every night, with the exception of Sundays,²⁷² in order to try and wreak as much havoc as they could. Half on the men would be responsible for setting up ambushes Monday through Wednesday, and the other half from Thursday to Saturday.²⁷³ Byrne continued that his ambushes were quite successful, and bragged that “as a result of one ambush there were military funerals through the streets every day for a whole week.”²⁷⁴ One of the most infamous acts of the I.R.A. occurred on November 21, 1920, known afterwards as Bloody Sunday. On Saturday, the entire Dublin Brigade of the I.R.A. was mobilized and ordered to meet at their company’s headquarters. As Patrick McCrea described, “in short, the operation was the elimination, on Sunday morning at 9 o’clock, of enemy spies and agents who had been listed by G.H.Q. Intelligence as men that should be executed as a military necessity.”²⁷⁵ Groups of men were assigned specific targets, and early Sunday morning groups of I.R.A. men assembled around Dublin and proceeded to their respective target’s location. The *Irish Times* reported that “all the houses [of those killed] had been marked; the streets were watched and patrolled; [and] an hour was chosen when the victims would be most helpless and unprepared.”²⁷⁶ 12 British officers were killed in one fell swoop, and several were wounded.²⁷⁷

However, not all I.R.A. ambushes were successful, and on many occasions I.R.A. companies waited hidden alongside a road for a convoy of British soldiers who never arrived. In

²⁷¹ BMH WS 461 (Joseph Byrne) p. 4.

²⁷² Or with the exception of most Sundays, since one of the most violent episodes in the entire war occurred on “Bloody Sunday,” not to be confused with the more infamous Bloody Sunday of 1972 which occurred in Northern Ireland.

²⁷³ BMH WS 461 (Joseph Byrne) p. 4.

²⁷⁴ BMH WS 461 (Joseph Byrne) p. 3.

²⁷⁵ BMH WS 413 (Patrick McCrea) p. 18.

²⁷⁶ “The Dublin Murders.” *The Irish Times (1874-1920)*: 4. Nov 22 1920. *ProQuest*. Web. 7 Mar. 2016 .

²⁷⁷ Townshend, *The British Campaign in Ireland*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1975) p. 129.

other instances, companies were forced to abandon an ambush and retreat when their grenades or explosive devices failed to detonate, or they were quickly outgunned and overrun by the vastly superior British military.²⁷⁸

The I.R.A.'s strategy in the countryside was similar to their overall strategy in the city – hit the enemy hard and fast, then retreat. In nearly every engagement members of the I.R.A. were equipped with inferior weapons, and a long protracted fight was almost never desired. However, sometimes they did occur, since after the Easter Rising possession of arms was an offense punishable by death. Thomas Barry, who served as a Captain in the Cork I.R.A. described that one day he and his column were hiding from a company of Tans and R.I.C., with little desire to fight. Despite their attempt to avoid the enemy, Barry wrote that, “we were fully armed at the time, and we had no option but to fight, as martial law was in force and it was the case of being executed for carrying arms.”²⁷⁹ Since Barry decided to engage the Black and Tans, the company was able to break through the British lines and retreat with limited casualties. If they had been captured they would have been quickly executed. In situations like these, British policy actually contributed to the increased violence, and prohibited members of the I.R.A. from surrendering.

The I.R.A. also attempted to sabotage British supply and communication lines as often as possible. Frequently, the I.R.A. would cut telegraph and telephone lines, and trench the sides of the roads, giving them ample cover from which to launch ambushes. Even if there was no I.R.A. force present, a trenched road would be extremely intimidating for a British force to travel, as an attack could come from anywhere at any time. I.R.A. companies would also fell trees across roads, forcing a British vehicle to stop at the site of the ambush.²⁸⁰ Hit and run style raids on British or R.I.C. barracks were also extremely common, but not always successful. However,

²⁷⁸ BMH WS 667 (Patrick Lawson) p. 11.

²⁷⁹ BMH WS 430 (Thomas Barry) p. 18.

²⁸⁰ BMH WS 975 (Matthew Finucane) p. 4.

sometimes the I.R.A. utilized informants, sympathizers, or agents serving in the R.I.C. to aid them. One R.I.C. Constable from Meath described:

[The] Trim R.I.C. Barracks was captured by the I.R.A. on 26th September 1920. They were helped from the inside, a door which leads on the Fair Green being left open for them. Constable Meehan, now a superintendent in the Civic Guards, at Granard, was responsible for this.²⁸¹

Like many of the I.R.A.'s victories, the attack on the Trim barracks was met with a harsh response from the British Auxiliaries. According to Seamus Finn, an Adjutant from the Meath Brigade of the I.R.A.:

The worst of the British official reprisals for the destruction of Trim R.I.C. barracks were not launched until approximately 4 o'clock on Monday morning when about 200 Auxiliaries and Black & Tans from Gormanstown descended upon the town and began an orgy of terror and destruction.²⁸²

According to Finn, roughly one quarter of the population was massacred, and much of the town was burnt.

Reprisals

The conflict following the Easter Rising saw acts of violence, revenge, murder, and terror become almost commonplace. British soldiers stationed in Ireland would behave in ways that would not have been acceptable if stationed elsewhere, and members of the I.R.A. answered their brutality with their own. One Second Lieutenant in the British Army wrote that, "The war office was greatly concerned because the troops in Dublin had been looting, an offense for which they

²⁸¹ BMH WS 467 (Eugene Bratton) p. 5.

²⁸² BMH WS 858 (Seamus Finn) p. 9.

would be shot if they were in France.”²⁸³ However, the troops who looted were not shot, and over the course of the war the Black and Tans specifically developed a reputation in particular as being merciless and brutal, prompting one Irishman to refer to their occupation as a “Reign of Terror.”²⁸⁴ Even some working for the British Authorities were appalled by the behavior of the Black and Tans, and one former Constable in the R.I.C. wrote that upon the signing of the 1921 treaty, “the ordinary rank and file of the R.I.C. were generally pleased that Ireland at least had succeeded in getting somewhere. As far as the Black and Tans were concerned, they did not give a damn, they were soldiers of fortune.”²⁸⁵

Looting or other acts of revenge became so common that it was the expected behavior after a raid or ambush by the I.R.A. One former Captain in the I.R.A. wrote that after a raid on a British patrol, “we remained around the village in case of reprisals. Although the military did arrive out and searched the houses they did not do any damage except the usual looting.”²⁸⁶ In other cases the Irish were not so lucky. Vincent Rice, a Dublin lawyer wrote that “in one week the terrorists [either British soldiers or Black and Tans] sacked the towns of Balbriggan, Miltown-Malby, Ennisymor, Lahinch, Mallow, and Trim, murdering ‘as often as not.’” British Auxiliaries often targeted the homes of known I.R.A. affiliates, and many saw their houses damaged or even burned. In cases in which there were exceptionally brutal British soldiers or Auxiliaries, the I.R.A. would try to respond in kind. One of the agents working undercover for the I.R.A. intelligence unit wrote that:

As a matter of interest, the addresses obtained from private correspondence of Auxiliary Cadets helped to establish the identity of these people, together with their home addresses in Great Britain. After the burning and sacking of Irish

²⁸³ BMH WS 979 (Robert Barton) p. 2.

²⁸⁴ BMH WS 843 (Vincent Rice) p. 1.

²⁸⁵ BMH WS 467 (Eugene Bratton) p. 11.

²⁸⁶ BMH WS 430 (Thomas Barry) p. 12.

towns, reprisals were taken by the I.R.A. in Great Britain by burning some of the Cadet's homes.²⁸⁷

Of course, many Auxiliaries or Regulars did not actively choose to be deployed in Ireland, and certainly most were not simply sadistic. One former British soldier wrote that “during the first great war [he] served in Egypt, the Dardanelles, Suez Canal, Salonika, and in Palestine” before his unit was transferred to Ireland in 1919.²⁸⁸ Some soldiers were simply stationed in Ireland, where they would become targets for simply driving a supply truck from base to base. It is not hard to imagine the sense of betrayal some soldiers might feel after having survived the horrors of World War I only to see their comrades gunned down by those who were supposed to be loyal to the Crown in an area that was supposed to be part of their own nation. One former Lieutenant in the British Army, Geoffry Ibberson, who fought and was wounded at the battle of Tourmakeady, admitted sometimes passions got the better of the men fighting. Ibberson wrote:

I realize that what ruled my actions that afternoon was anger and desire for revenge (this latter, in any case being an unpraiseworthy quality) at seeing the bodies of those simple men of the R.I.C. loyal to their uniforms, stretched out on the ground at Tourmakeday.²⁸⁹

Ibberson was so enraged during the battle, that he took off in pursuit of the retreating I.R.A. column with only two other men, and shot and killed some of them as they continued to withdraw.

Many Sinn Feiners, sympathizers with the I.R.A., or family members of known I.R.A. soldiers were arrested by the British as a way deterring aid to or participation in the I.R.A. Targeting family members was also a tactic used to punish those on the run. One I.R.A. fighter described that when the British authorities could not find him, they arrested his brother in his place. Being from a rural area, he described that the arrest of his brother was a huge burden to his

²⁸⁷ BMH WS 434 (Charles Dalton) p. 15.

²⁸⁸ BMH WS 1045 (George Henry Roberts) p. 1.

²⁸⁹ BMH WS 1307 (Geoffrey Ibberson) p. 2.

family, since with both the men gone only his mother and sister were left to manage their family farm.²⁹⁰

Although the Tans in particular acquired a reputation for brutality, the regulars of the R.I.C. were not free of corruption themselves, and there are many alleged incidents of members carrying out brutal killings alongside the Black and Tans. In one allegation, the Head Constable of Meath, who had a daughter that worked in the post office and was frequently chastised by her boss, had her boss “taken from his house by three armed men in civilian clothes and shot and thrown into the river.”²⁹¹ The Constable, who was aided by his brother, the County Inspector for the R.I.C., and a Tan, then covered up the crime by pinning on the I.R.A.²⁹² In another example, Mary Clancy, the widow of Limerick Mayor George Clancy, wrote that “in the final stages of the Terror, armed forces of the crown raided private houses with the set purpose of murdering prominent Republicans.”²⁹³ Her husband was one of those republicans murdered, and was shot in his home by three disguised men, while he was still Mayor of Limerick! Mary herself was shot and wounded in the attack, and was later put under the protection of the I.R.A., who stood guard around her house following the attack.²⁹⁴

However, some members of the R.I.C. had different attitudes than the British soldiers or Auxiliaries, and were even sympathetic to the republican movement. For example, one R.I.C. Constable from Meath wrote that before the Rising and “during the Home Rule movement the Police were generally disinterested, and I would say that the majority of them were in favor of Home Rule.”²⁹⁵ Prior to the Rising the police were required to attend the Volunteers’ parades and

²⁹⁰ BMH WS 430 (Thomas Barry) p. 26.

²⁹¹ BMH WS 467 (Eugene Bratton) pp 6-7.

²⁹² BMH WS 467 (Eugene Bratton) pp 6-7.

²⁹³ BMH WS 806 (Mary Clancy) pp. 9-10.

²⁹⁴ BMH WS 806 (Mary Clancy) p. 18.

²⁹⁵ BMH WS 467 (Eugene Bratton) p. 1.

assemblies, but there was little violence.²⁹⁶ However, after the Rising R.I.C. barracks became a prime target of the I.R.A., and some members of the R.I.C. were targeted by the I.R.A. and shot, creating fierce animosity between the R.I.C. and the I.R.A.

Anger over the death of comrades was relatively common reason for British or R.I.C. forces to lash out. While imprisoned, one I.R.A. member was pulled from his cell by a group of Tans. He was then forced to look at the body of a Tan who had been killed in a recent ambush, was beat over the head with a revolver, then forced to run around the prison yard while the Tans fired shots at him. The Tans did not care that he was imprisoned during the ambush which killed their friend – they simply wanted to vent their anger.²⁹⁷ In another case, Patrick Lennon reported that a group of Black and Tans went into his house searching for him, and upon finding the house empty proceeded to bayonet his dog.²⁹⁸

Intelligence and Counter Intelligence

Intelligence gathering was crucial for both the I.R.A. and the British authorities. The British invested much time and many resources into infiltrating the I.R.A. In response, the I.R.A. established its own intelligence division led by Michael Collins, who recruited agents serving in Dublin Castle, the R.I.C., or Dublin Metropolitan Police (D.M.P.) to send intelligence reports to the I.R.A. Early in the conflict it proved difficult to gain access to sources of information within the British forces, since everyone in the civil service was required to take an oath of loyalty to

²⁹⁶ BMH WS 467 (Eugene Bratton) p. 1.

²⁹⁷ BMH WS 667 (Patrick Lawson) p. 10.

²⁹⁸ BMH WS 1336 (Patrick Lennon) p. 11.

the British Crown.²⁹⁹ One member of Collins's intelligence unit noted that in the early days of their operation even "the amount of information gathered through interception, raids on mails, etc. was rather limited, due to [a] lack of co-operators."³⁰⁰ Another of Collins' operatives cited that "there were scarcely a half dozen" members of the D.M.P. aiding Collins' unit.³⁰¹ Even when the unit received information, sometimes they were so short staffed they failed to act on it. Several members of the I.R.A. were arrested by the British forces because no one from Collins's unit was able to notify them before they were located by the authorities.³⁰² Collins would often clandestinely meet his contacts himself, rather than send someone in his stead. According to one of his informants within the Mountjoy Prison, even when the two of them were almost apprehended by the British forces "Mick was cool, calm, and collected and did not show any fright."³⁰³ Although there were never many informants working for Collins's intelligence unit, over time they grew more sophisticated and did manage to recruit more informants, with some in high level positions.

David Neligan, who resigned from the D.M.P. after the violence escalated, was convinced by Collins to rejoin the force and act as an I.R.A. agent. The I.R.A. arranged for threatening letters to be sent to Neligan, so he could rejoin under the premise that he did not feel safe returning to his home in the countryside.³⁰⁴ Neligan rejoined the D.M.P., and eventually worked his way up the ranks to obtain a position within the British Secret Service, ironically tasked with infiltrating the I.R.A. and hunting down people like himself. Agents like Neligan helped supply the I.R.A. with crucial information, such as to whom the British planned on

²⁹⁹ BMH WS 434 (Charles Dalton) p. 2.

³⁰⁰ BMH WS 434 (Charles Dalton) p. 2.

³⁰¹ BMH WS 380 (David Neligan) p. 11.

³⁰² BMH WS 434 (Charles Dalton) p. 2.

³⁰³ BMH WS 942 (Patrick Joseph Berry) p. 12.

³⁰⁴ BMH WS 380 (David Neligan) p. 1.

arresting and when, giving them ample time to avoid capture. Furthermore, Collins used his agents to help supply the British with false intelligence reports. Neligan described:

I was expected to make an intelligence report once a week. Collins often helped me to write these reports; in fact, he wrote them himself. Many a good laugh we had over them! He used to say in these reports that the I.R.A. was in no way short of arms or ammunition; recruits were simply falling over each other; they had plenty of money; new columns were being formed to fight the British.³⁰⁵

According to Neligan, these reports were believed by his superiors in the British Secret Service, and were effective at creating a sense of apprehension among the British in Dublin, who were plagued by shootings, murders, and assassinations, with no end in sight.

A special group within Collins' intelligence unit dubbed "The Squad" or "The Twelve Apostles," was "formed to carry out individual shootings of enemy agents and spies."³⁰⁶ The Squad was put under the direct command of Paddy Daly, but worked under Collins' authority as a part of the I.R.A.'s General Headquarters, or G.H.Q. The Squad would sometimes be given a specific target to assassinate, but other times would just be ordered to patrol the city and open fire on any Tan or British Officer they encountered.³⁰⁷ The Squad also took on especially dangerous missions, including attempts to rescue high value prisoners from British custody. Originally, the Squad consisted of only 12 men, but later grew to 21 members, and was divided up into 3 separate squads.³⁰⁸

Unsurprisingly, many innocents were killed in the crossfire between Collins's Squad and their British targets, who were often spies dressed in normal clothing and attempting to blend in with the civilian population. Neligan wrote that on one occasion in particular:

Collins's squad did attack a bunch of plain-clothed men outside the Castle and killed three of them...those poor wretches were merely dispatch riders and were

³⁰⁵ BMH WS 380 (David Neligan) p. 18.

³⁰⁶ BMH WS 667 (Patrick Lawson) p. 12.

³⁰⁷ BMH WS 461 (Joseph Byrne) p. 5.

³⁰⁸ BMH WS 667 (Patrick Lawson) p. 12.

mistakenly taken for members of the Igo gang [who had been murdering I.R.A. sympathizers].³⁰⁹

Friendly fire was also a risk, and on at least one occasion, undercover I.R.A. agents working for the British were mistakenly shot by their own men, who had taken it on themselves to target British agents.

To counter Collins's men, the British employed their own sophisticated methods of counterintelligence. An entire plain clothed unit of the D.M.P., called the "G" Division, was tasked with eliminating members of the I.R.A. and gathering intelligence. The "G" Division frequently surveilled known members of the I.R.A. and their sympathizers, and "every 'G' man kept a journal in which he entered the names of political suspects he had seen that day and other relevant data in connection with his work watching the revolutionaries."³¹⁰ It was also not uncommon for members in this unit to gun down high profile I.R.A. members in the street.³¹¹ Furthermore, any time there was an incident involving the shooting of British personnel there would be a thorough investigation by the unit. During these investigations the "G" men would often interrogate possible I.R.A. informants, and attempt to get them to double cross the I.R.A.³¹²

Members of the I.R.A. who were captured by the British often tried to resist interrogations, and minimize the amount of information that would fall into British hands. Important documents would be carefully hidden from the British, or destroyed if likely to fall into British hands.³¹³ When Patrick Lawson was arrested with a roster of his Company's members, he describes how he went through extraordinary lengths to safeguard the information:

I was kept in the guardroom [at Dublin Castle] and a Volunteer named J.P. Ryan, the company I.O. was put next to me. We discussed the predicament I was in

³⁰⁹ BMH WS 380 (David Neligan) p. 15.

³¹⁰ BMH WS 380 (David Neligan) p. 4.

³¹¹ BMH WS 380 (David Neligan) p. 16.

³¹² BMH WS 434 (Charles Dalton) p. 6.

³¹³ BMH WS 928 (John Shields) p. 11.

having the company rolls on my person, and we decided that there was nothing for it but to chew and eat the pages containing the names. It was a terrible job.³¹⁴

Lawson also noted that during his unit's imprisonment, one of their men was so badly injured from the interrogation he was not fit to be transferred to a prison with the rest of them.

In the event an informant or I.R.A. member did turn and begin giving information to the British, the I.R.A. dealt with them quite harshly. If a member of the I.R.A. was caught spying or behaving insubordinately they were often "sentenced" to death. Neligan described the lengths to which the I.R.A. would go to in order to carry out its justice:

The escaped prisoner [from British custody] was a man named Fowargue. Collins afterwards told us that he had recently joined the Volunteers and on being arrested betrayed his comrades and volunteered to work for the English. He was shot in England afterwards by the I.R.A. over there. Joe Shanahan and Reggie Dunne executed him at some golf course outside London.³¹⁵

Furthermore, Collins and other members of his intelligence unit were very weary of who they brought in to become an informant. Even if someone approached them with good intentions, overzealous amateurs posed as much of a threat as double agents, since they could be easily flipped, followed, or fed misinformation by the British.³¹⁶

British Secret Service agents and members of the "G" Division were also weary of being double crossed. Secret Service agents, who were brought in when some in the British Government felt the "G" Division had lost its effectiveness, were boarded in the homes of carefully vetted loyalists, who were often Freemasons or those who had protestant servants.³¹⁷

The British also employed more subtle schemes to try and undermine the I.R.A. In one case, the British rigged large quantities of ammunition to misfire in the rifle barrel. This ammunition was then purposefully allowed to fall into I.R.A. hands, in the hopes that it would be

³¹⁴ BMH WS 667 (Patrick Lawson) p. 10.

³¹⁵ BMH WS 380 (David Neligan) p. 4.

³¹⁶ BMH WS 434 (Charles Dalton) p. 6.

³¹⁷ BMH WS 380 (David Neligan) p. 18.

distributed among the members.³¹⁸ However, Neligan discovered the plot while working undercover in Dublin Castle, and alerted Collins, who got the word out that any cartridge with the marking “z.z.” was faulty.³¹⁹ Unlike the Fenian Uprising of 1867, this time the Irish rebels were not easily infiltrated by British agents, and were in fact quite successful at infiltrating the British forces themselves.

The Truce and Treaty

As the war dragged on, British public opinion began to drift towards reconciliation. British officers and soldiers continued to be gunned down by the I.R.A., who also targeted any loyalist or civilian who happened to inform the British authorities of their movements or plans.³²⁰ From 1919 until the time of the truce, the British government recorded that 405 police had been killed with 682 wounded, 150 members of the Military had been killed with 345 wounded, and 196 civilians had been killed with 185 wounded.³²¹ The cycle of violence clearly began weighing on the British public’s mind, and in one editorial for the *London Times*, the author wrote that “not only have reprisals demonstrably failed in their object, but their continuance has involved consequences that make any other policy increasingly difficult.”³²² Other Englishmen viewed the situation more pragmatically, and simply did not see the value of continuing the conflict.

³¹⁸ BMH WS 434 (Charles Dalton) p. 13.

³¹⁹ BMH WS 380 (David Neligan) p. 19.

³²⁰ Holt p. 241.

³²¹ Townshend, *The British Campaign in Ireland*. p. 214.

³²²“Where Are We Going?." *Times* [London, England] 3 Mar. 1921: 11. *The Times Digital Archive*. Web. 7 Mar. 2016

Another editorial argued that “the present conditions in Ireland can not continue; if they do I am firmly convinced that Ireland will be ruined.”³²³

Although the British personnel had vastly superior weapons and equipment, and the I.R.A. was always desperately short on arms and ammunition, members of the I.R.A. vastly outnumbered the British soldiers stationed in Ireland. It was estimated that the British employed about 50,000 troops in Ireland (35,000 regulars, 12,500 R.I.C. and Black and Tans, and 1,500 Auxiliaries) while the I.R.A. was estimated to number somewhere around 112,000 (even though only a mere fraction of that number was ever active in the field at any one time).³²⁴ Soon, even some members of the British government began favoring some sort of diplomatic solution. The Better Government of Ireland Act passed in 1920 created two separate Parliaments for the 6 counties of Ulster and the remainder of Southern Ireland, in a scheme similar to the Home Rule bill that failed to pass before the First World War. However, in order to be recognized by the British Government at least half of the elected members to the parliament had to take an oath of allegiance to King George V. On the day in which the oath was to be administered (June 28, 1921) only 4 of the 128 members of the southern Parliament were present, therefore preventing the British Government from officially recognizing it as the Parliament of Southern Ireland.³²⁵

Clearly, the Better Government of Ireland Act was not a success in the south, but at a speech before the Ulster Parliament on June 22, King George V called for a “new era of peace, contentment and goodwill” in Ireland.³²⁶ This speech influenced some policy makers in England, but preliminary negotiations had already begun in early April when Lord Derby met with the

³²³ DECIES. "Ireland-A New Appeal." *Times* [London, England] 10 Mar. 1921: 6. *The Times Digital Archive*. Web. 7 Mar. 2016.

³²⁴ Holt p. 252.

³²⁵ Holt pp. 248-250.

³²⁶ Holt p. 252.

President of the Dáil, Éamon de Valera.³²⁷ The I.R.A. was determined to keep fighting until the end, and the initiative for truce negotiations came not from the I.R.A. or Dáil, but from members of the British Government.³²⁸

On July 11, 1921, the Truce was announced to members of the I.R.A. and British military. Michael Brennan wrote that after news of the truce reached them:

We were surrounded by an almost hysterical crowd. One of the most excited was a British sergeant (named Doyle I think) wearing the ribbon of the Victoria Cross on his tunic. We were, of course, fully armed and equipped and our appearance was tangible proof that “The Terror” was ended.³²⁹

However, many in the I.R.A. and I.R.B. did not think the Truce would last. Brennan wrote that “Collins, Mulcahy, Gearoid O’Sullivan, and others [from G.H.Q] all emphasized that they didn’t expect the Truce to last very long, and that it must be used to improve our organization and training.”³³⁰ Cathal Brugha, who at the time was serving as the Dáil’s Minister of Defense, was notoriously skeptical of the Truce and initially feared that if the I.R.A. accepted it they would lose the initiative, and would have difficulty resuming their guerrilla campaign against the British.³³¹ Brugha, with Collins’ blessing, had the I.R.A. use the Truce as an opportunity to rearm, collect more ammunition, and continue training.³³² During a subsequent Dáil debate on the treaty, Brugha even concocted a scheme in which he and a few others would launch a suicidal attack on the British House of Commons with the intention of gunning down as many Cabinet Ministers as possible before being killed by the British security forces.³³³

However, both Collins and de Valera were strongly in favor of accepting the Truce and sending a peace delegation to London. As Ernest Blythe put it, “at that time, when Collins and de

³²⁷ Holt p. 247.

³²⁸ BMH WS 979 (Robert Barton) p. 30.

³²⁹ Brennan pp. 104-105.

³³⁰ Brennan p. 105.

³³¹ BMH WS 939 (Ernest Blythe) p. 130.

³³² BMH WS 979 (Robert Barton) p. 32.

³³³ BMH WS 722 (Dan MacCarthy) p. 24.

Valera were in agreement on any point, there was practically no possibility that the majority of the Cabinet would go against them.”³³⁴ Several delegations were sent to negotiate, and eventually a final delegation consisting of Robert Barton, George Gavan Duffy, Eamonn Duggan, Arthur Griffith, and Michael Collins was presented with a treaty to sign and bring back to the Dáil to be ratified.

The treaty itself established the Irish Free State, which would be an equal member of the British Commonwealth equivalent to Canada, Australia, or South Africa. However, a representative of the Crown (equivalent to the Governor General of Canada) would still be appointed, and members of the Dáil would be required to swear loyalty to the Irish Free State, but also state “that I will be faithful to H.M. King George V., [and] his heirs and successors by law.” Furthermore, the Irish Free State would not be permitted to have a military that was proportionally larger (in terms of population) than that of Great Britain, and the Royal Navy would continue to provide for the coastal defense of Ireland until the Irish Free State established its own Navy. No Irish ports could refuse entry to British ships (or vice versa), and some British military personnel would be allowed to remain on Irish soil.³³⁵ The terms of the Treaty sat uneasy with some, especially the clause about being faithful to the Crown, and both Gavan Duffy and Robert Barton were initially reluctant to sign the treaty. However, Lloyd George assured the Irish delegation that if all 5 did not sign there would once again be open war with England, and Barton described that both he and Duffy felt that the two of them alone did not have the authority to commit Ireland to war.³³⁶ Therefore, on December 6, 1921 the Treaty was signed by all five delegates.

³³⁴ BMH WS 939 (Ernest Blythe) p. 130.

³³⁵ National Archives of Ireland. “Articles of Agreement.” Last modified 1 May 2002. <http://treaty.nationalarchives.ie/document-gallery/anglo-irish-treaty-6-december-1921/>

³³⁶ BMH WS 979 (Robert Barton) p. 41

Although the Treaty was signed by both the Irish and British delegates, each parliament was required to ratify it. Once the Treaty was returned to the Dáil, there was intense debate among the representatives, with some arguing against the treaty. According to Barton, “President de Valera issued a manifesto on his own behalf, disagreeing with the Articles before the Dáil met.”³³⁷ Gavan Duffy, who was reluctant to sign it in London, also openly spoke out against the treaty. This created considerable conflict within the Dáil, and Barton described that once Duffy spoke out:

For three hours we had the most frightful battle in the delegation, among ourselves, at which the most terrific things were said to Gavan Duffy and to me by Collins, Griffith and Duggan. They called us murderers, stated that we would be hanged from lamp posts, and that we would destroy all they had fought for.³³⁸

Griffith led the campaign for the ratification of the treaty in the Dáil, arguing that “I signed the Treaty not as an ideal thing, but fully believing what I believe now, as a Treaty honorable to Ireland and safeguarding the interests of Ireland.”³³⁹ Opponents to the Treaty saw it as a betrayal of the Irish Republic which had been declared by Pearse and the other heroes of the Easter Rising in the Dublin G.P.O. After all, many men willing to give up their lives in the service of the Irish *Republican* Army felt they were fighting for that Republic – not a position within the British Commonwealth only marginally better than would Ireland would have been under Home Rule – which had failed to placate the founders of the Irish Volunteers years earlier.³⁴⁰ Griffith’s response to this argument was, essentially, that the semantical differences between “Free State” and “Republic” were not worth continuing the violent and costly conflict,³⁴¹ but he was brutally attacked by opponents in the Dáil for expressing such sentiments.

³³⁷ BMH WS 979 (Robert Barton) WS p. 40.

³³⁸ BMH WS 979 (Robert Barton) p. 41.

³³⁹ Arthur Griffith, *Arguments for the Treaty*. (Dublin: Martin Lester Limited, 1922) p. 5.

³⁴⁰ BMH WS 1777 (Thomas Reidy) pp. 1-2.

³⁴¹ Arthur Griffith, “Arguments for the Treaty” p. 6.

The fighting in the Dáil destroyed Griffith, who became prone to boughs of anxiety as his health deteriorated, and Blythe argued that:

[Griffith] had spent years of his life denouncing the Old Irish Party for their lack of principle and lack of courage and when all his arguments and epithets were turned against himself they wounded him as they would not have wounded another.³⁴²

It soon became apparent to some that the country was drifting towards civil war – split between those who supported the Treaty and those who opposed it. The issue was so divisive that on the eve of the vote to ratify the Treaty Griffith felt certain the vote would go in the favor of the Treaty, but only by a margin of one vote.³⁴³ However, the Treaty did pass, and on January 7, 1922 it was approved in the Dáil by a margin of 64 to 57. Despite the ratification of the Treaty, the fighting continued. Only this time, the men of the I.R.A. were not fighting against the British, but against each other.

³⁴² BMH WS 939 (Ernest Blythe) p. 146.

³⁴³ BMH WS 939 (Ernest Blythe) pp. 137-138.

Epilogue

The Irish Civil War, which was full of many ironies, saw a drastic split in the I.R.A. that pitted former comrades against one another in yet another bloody conflict. Those who opposed the Treaty were led by Rory O'Connor (who served as the Director of Engineering for the I.R.A.) Other notables such as Liam Mellows (the director of purchases) and Oscar Traynor (Commandant of the Dublin Brigade) supported O'Connor, and the anti-Treaty forces quickly took up arms against the Dáil, which they viewed as an illegitimate body for forsaking the Irish Republic.³⁴⁴ De Valera, Markievicz, and Brugha were three notables, among many, who joined the anti-treaty faction. Those in the anti-Treaty faction, referred to by those in the Dáil as the "Irregulars," utilized the tactics they knew and had perfected in the previous years – guerrilla warfare. Many Irregulars still possessed their arms from the war, and others looted them from the new formally established army of the Irish Free State. The civil war that ensued was extremely bloody and filled with assassinations and reprisal killings, just as the Anglo-Irish War had been. Michael Collins, the Commander in Chief of the Army of the Irish Free State, was one of the first notables to succumb to the outbreak of violence, and was gunned down on the street shortly after the fighting began (and only 10 days after Griffith's funeral).³⁴⁵

Karl Marx once wrote that, "history repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce." The Irish Civil War was both. The Irregulars captured by the forces of the Irish Free State demanded to be treated as prisoners of war, just as the Irish Volunteers had after the Easter Rising. Like the Volunteers, the Irregulars were denied that treatment, and took to hunger strikes as protest. However, Blythe, who remained fiercely devoted to the Government of the Irish Free State, described that in response:

³⁴⁴ Holt p. 285.

³⁴⁵ BMH WS 939 (Ernest Blythe) pp. 154-155.

I then prepared a document and directed the Governor to read it to the prisoners. In this I stated that they would not be released, that when they died, the Civil War powers that we then possessed would be used to prevent any inquest or any announcement of their deaths in the newspapers, and that they would be buried in unmarked and unrecorded graves in the prison.³⁴⁶

Furthermore, just as the British did before them, the Government of the Irish Free State adopted a policy which declared that anyone found in possession of illegal firearms would be executed. Erskine Childers, who had been a staunch supporter of the Republican movement since the formation of the Irish Volunteers, and who was responsible for the success of the arms landing at Howth, was executed by the government of the Irish Free State for simply possessing a revolver.³⁴⁷ The fighting that broke out was perhaps even more violent than the guerrilla campaign against the British, as captured Irregulars were sometimes executed on the spot by the forces of the Irish Free State, who like the Black and Tans before them adopted a policy of state sponsored terror to destroy the morale of the rebels. Amazingly, Blythe wrote that in response to acts of assassination, sabotage, or guerrilla raids by the Irregulars, “it would be our [the Irish Free State’s] duty to supply sufficient counter terror to neutralize the terror which was being used against us.”³⁴⁸

The great tragedy of the Civil War was the gratuitous loss of life that occurred amongst those who had already given so much in the fight for Irish freedom and independence. In one of the most poetic episodes of the Civil War, Cathal Brugha, who at the time had occupied Barry’s Hotel in Dublin, ordered his men to surrender once they were surrounded by the forces of the Irish Free State and as the hotel began burning down around them. However, Brugha himself refused to surrender. As one of his comrades described:

³⁴⁶ BMH WS 939 (Ernest Blythe) p. 162.

³⁴⁷ BMH WS 939 (Ernest Blythe) p. 185.

³⁴⁸ BMH WS 939 (Ernest Blythe) p. 174.

We kept moving back from the smoke until we reached the back door. We went out into the lane. Cathal had a revolver in each hand and kept shouting “No Surrender.” He was shot in the hip, the femoral artery being severed.³⁴⁹

Eventually, the forces of the Irish Free State were able to defeat the Irregulars, and on May 24, 1923 de Valera, who had taken over leadership of the anti-treaty forces, ordered all Irregulars to surrender.³⁵⁰ Although the forces of the Irish Free State had succeeded, their success came at a terrible cost. The Irish Republican Army may have triumphed against the British, but in the end it succumbed to itself.

³⁴⁹ BMH WS 404 (Linda McWhinney) p. 20.

³⁵⁰ Holt p. 307.

Conclusion

The Irish revolted in 1594, 1608, 1641, 1798, 1848, and 1867, but each time failed to throw off the English yoke. Yet, while each of these past rebellions failed, the I.R.A. finally managed to achieve Irish independence in 1921, even if they had to concede the notion of a republic. A large factor of their success is likely due to the increase in Irish nationalism that occurred in early 20th century, which laid the foundation for the popular support the I.R.A. received during the Anglo-Irish War. The writings of Arthur Griffith and Eoin MacNeill spread across the country, and more Irishmen began to see Ireland as a nation, rather than a province of the United Kingdom. In 1867, the Fenians failed to win support of the common people, just as the Young Ireland movement had in 1848. For the first time, in the 20th century, there was a broad base of support for the Irish rebels. The *Fianna Éireann*, *Cumman na mBa*, *Clan na Gael*, Gaelic Athletic Association, Gaelic League, *Cumman na Gaelheal*, and *Sinn Féin* all formed as a result of this increase in nationalism, and all contributed to establishing a sense of national identity and desire for self-determination. Young Irishmen could join these organizations, learn about their shared cultural heritage and history, and become a part of something greater than themselves. Publications like *The Irish Volunteer*, *An t-Óglác*, and *An Claidheam Soluis* all helped spread these ideas of Irish nationalism and nationhood, as well as the writings of Griffith and MacNeill, and certainly contributed to the eventual success of the Republican movement.

In the past, Irish rebels had often been either aristocrats or radicals – just as those who planned the Easter Rising were intellectuals, labor leaders, or members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (a radical secret society bent on overthrowing the English). The Easter Rising of 1916 was neither a popular revolution nor a revolution from above, and failed in part because the rebels failed to initiate popular revolts in other areas of the country. However, the British

Government's harsh response to the Rising, especially their execution of the rebel leaders, galvanized popular support for the I.R.A. when they waged their guerrilla campaign from 1919 to 1921.

In World War I the British suffered 3,190,235 casualties.³⁵¹ Many British people personally knew at least one person who had been killed or wounded in the war, and many British felt little desire to continue losing soldiers fighting a bloody campaign in Ireland, even if the casualties were in comparison far fewer than those suffered in the Great War. Furthermore, every previous Irish rebellion had been put down by English forces relatively quickly – the rebellion of 1608 lasted under a year, the rebellion of 1641 lasted 7 months, the rebellion of 1798 lasted 4 months, the rebellion of 1848 lasted mere hours, and the Fenian uprising of 1867 collapsed before the end of the year. The British had little experience fighting a long, protracted guerrilla war in Ireland, and in early 1921, after several years of fighting, still saw no end to the conflict. To make the situation even more tenuous for the British, this was no ordinary rebellion. This was a rebellion in which insurgents could assassinate a British officer and then simply disappear into the general population and go about their daily business. On Bloody Sunday, Patrick McCrea describes how he woke up early in the morning, met up with some pals from his I.R.A. Company, broke into the home where a British officer was staying, killed him, returned to his home to have breakfast, and then proceeded to go to Sunday mass as if nothing had happened.³⁵² The I.R.A.'s guerrilla campaign against the British was both brutal and relentless, and over time it became increasingly difficult for the British to separate insurgent from civilian.

³⁵¹ PBS. "WWI Casualties and Death Tables" http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/resources/casdeath_pop.html

³⁵² BMH WS 413 (Patrick McCrea) p. 19.

Moreover, Ireland was not Afghanistan or Africa. It was not some far off British colony, or some obscure war that would only make the back page of the *London Times*. It was a territory in the heartland of the United Kingdom. The insurgents spoke English and were citizens of the United Kingdom, and although they were not technically Anglo-Saxon, they were not some indigenous tribe in a far off land who could be written off as godless savages, even if some English tried. Mao Zedong once wrote that guerrilla warfare is “the inevitable result of the clash between oppressor and oppressed when the latter reach their limits of their endurance.”³⁵³ Not only had the Irish reached their limits of their endurance, but after years of fighting the I.R.A. in Ireland and the Central Powers in Europe and the Middle East, the British had simply had enough as well.

³⁵³ Mao Tse-Tung, “On Guerrilla Warfare.” <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/1937/guerrilla-warfare/index.htm>

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