

The Road to the Rising Part 3

Increasing Militarisation and a Mutiny

By the 20th of March 1914, senior officers in the British Army stationed at the Curragh Camp in County Kildare threatened to resign rather than implement the Home Rule Act in Ulster. Many of these officers were Protestant themselves and strongly sympathised with the Northern Unionists, in addition, they were privately encouraged by their senior officers in London. The Mutiny had three immediate affects. Firstly, unionists became more confident of their position in the north. Secondly, many otherwise constitutional nationalists realised that the British army could not be trusted to implement Home Rule leading to more support for the Irish Volunteers. Thirdly, the reality of an army mutiny began to convince the British government that partition was a more viable option.

On April 2nd 1914, Countess Constance Markievicz, Agnes O'Farrelly and a number of other women established Cumann Na mBan as a woman's volunteer force dedicated to achieving Irish freedom. The group would see action all over the city during the Rising as both a medical attaché to the Irish Volunteers and as a militant force. On April 24th 35,000 rifles landed in Larne for the UVF from Germany, three months later, 900 rifles arrived in Howth from Hamburg, Germany. That same day, a crowd gathered on Bachelors Walk and mocked the returning British soldiers for their failure to seize the arms from the Volunteers, the British soldiers turned on the crowd and fired a volley killing 4 people and injuring 38.

The War, The Rising

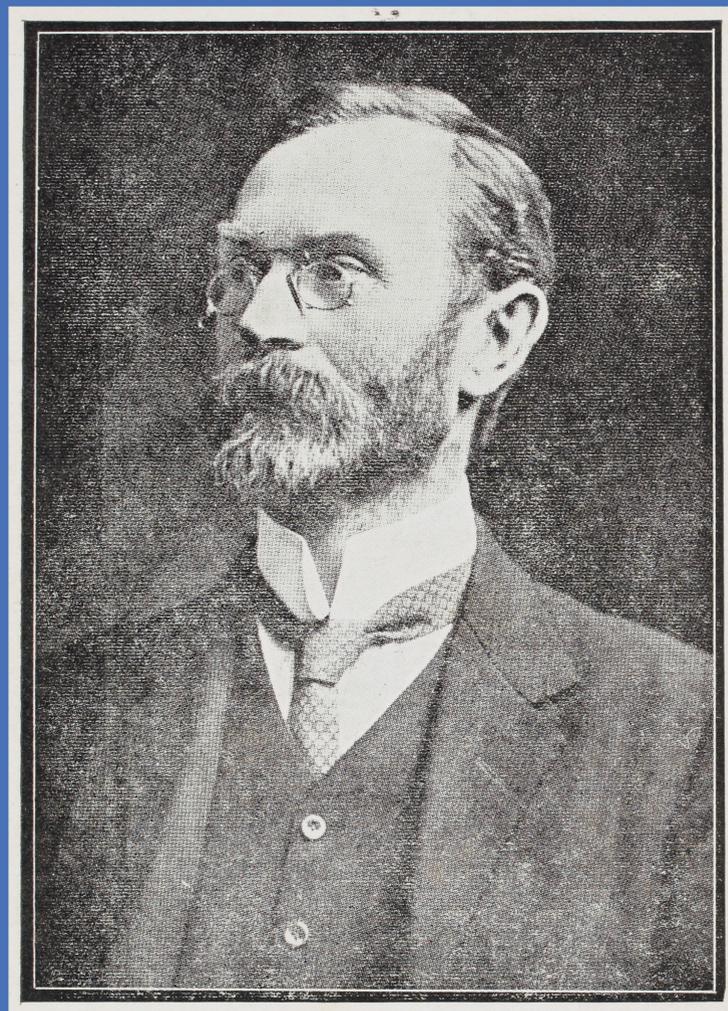
John Redmond, who feared the rise of the Irish Volunteers, issued an ultimatum to the IRB leadership. He wanted the Irish Parliamentary Party to take a controlling share of the organisation. Reluctantly, and accepting that the Parliamentary Party had more sway with the people, the IRB leadership conceded.



Irish Volunteers

Britain declared war on Germany on August 4th 1914, a World War had begun, and the Home Rule Bill is shelved for the duration of the conflict. In September, the Irish Republican Brotherhood agreed on the strategy to attack Britain while it was at war with Germany. Later that month, John Redmond believing the best way to pursue Home Rule was to show loyalty to the Crown, formed the National Volunteers, 170,000 Irish Volunteers would be sent to the Front to fight for the British army. Leaving the Irish Volunteers with a force of 11,000 under the command of Eoin MacNeill.

The Irish Republican Brotherhood formed a military council by 1915 comprising Patrick Pearse, Éamonn Ceannt and Joseph Plunkett (because of their controlling positions in the Irish Volunteers), Thomas Clarke and Seán Mac



Eoin MacNeill

Diarmada. Over the coming year, this would grow to include James Connolly and Thomas Mac Donagh. It would become the first provisional government and the body that drafted and signed the Proclamation of Independence. The inclusion of James Connolly (though previously not a member of the IRB) now meant that any proposed insurrection would also involve the Irish Citizen Army. In January 1916, the Military Council set a date for an uprising in Easter of that year. However, they still required further arms to be supplied by Roger Casement sailing on the Aud yacht from Germany.

Germany saw Britain's weakness as its opportunity, by arming the nationalist Irish. It hoped to create fertile ground for civil war with Irish Unionists. This action it felt, would remove Britain entirely from the war. Similar tactics would later be more effectively employed by Germany when it repatriated the influential Marxist, Vladimir Lenin to Russia.

Volunteer manoeuvres were arranged for Easter week across the country. The Council was distrustful of those outside of its immediate membership and told no one that these manoeuvres were a front to the Rising. The Chief of Staff of the Irish Volunteers, Eoin MacNeill, discovered the ruse on Holy Thursday and immediately issued countermanding orders to all volunteers to stand down. MacNeill felt the force was not ready to engage with the British Army. The Council informed MacNeill about the planned Aud landing with 20,000 rifles in Kerry. Heartened by the news, he withdrew his orders and the Rising was planned for Easter Sunday. However, luck was not with the Volunteers as Casement was captured off the coast of Kerry and the Aud and her precious cargo was scuttled. Eoin MacNeill once again halted all manoeuvres. On April 23rd, the IRB Military Council met in Liberty Hall and agreed to put the word out to all volunteers that could be reached to mobilise the following day regardless of MacNeill's order.

Easter Monday April 24th, noon, the General Post Office on Sackville Street, along with several positions around the city were commandeered by the Irish Volunteers, the Irish Citizen Army and Cumann Na mBan. The Easter Rising had begun....