**Nenagh Guardian**

**Toomevara man raising the Rising’s ‘Aud’**

**30 June 2012**

Sir Roger Casement’s ship – the Aud – which forever changed the course of Irish history through its pivotal role in the 1916 Easter Rising has been finally honoured during the week. The Aud which lies deep in a watery grave off the coast of Cork had its giant anchors recovered and raised to the surface on Tuesday June 19th after 96 years underwater.

   George AleXander Clayton, formerly of Pallas, Toomevara, and whose mother was a Hogan from Brownstown, Ballymackey, has worked with a team of underwater engineers in the daring year-long operation to release the anchors from the tragic ship’s rotting hull.

   “Eoin McGarry, probably one of the best technical salvage divers in the world, has spear-headed this entire operation. His engineering work when we are down there at such depth underwater must be seen to be believed!” Mr Clayton, who is also directing the underwater filming of the operation for his documentary ‘The Casement Ship’, said from the operations area last week.

   Eoin McGarry is the diver who made headlines several years ago by bringing back the “smoking gun” evidence from the wreck of the liner RMS Lusitania which lies in almost 500 feet of water. A technical diving operation comparable in its arduousness to working in outer space.

   “We have been up against impossible odds what with wild weather at sea, strenuous depths, freezing temperatures and hazardous objects on the shipwreck itself. But it has all been worth the tremendous effort put in by all those involved.”

   The Nenagh native who writes under the pseudonym Xander Clayton, about Roger Casement and the Aud praised his colleagues who have assembled an expert project team from all walks of life to bring the project into fruition.

   “Eoin McGarry and I were chatting after one of my lectures about the Aud at the Blackwater SubAqua Club in November 2010. Eoin had seen my slideshow showing how an anchor from the Aud might look on open public display for the Irish people. He made it quite clear to me during our conversation that releasing an anchor from the Aud’s hawser may not be as difficult as I had at first expected. I immediately said ‘let’s do it’ and Eoin began the long process of getting a licence from the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht, the National Museum of Ireland, National Monuments Service and Dúchas for permission to raise the Aud’s anchors.” Minister Jimmy Deenihan granted the license to lift the Aud’s relics from the sea.

   Now safely on land the anchors have been transported to Tralee by Moriarty Engineering and placed into a set of specially constructed preservation tanks for desalination over the next four years. The conservation process is being carefully monitored by the National Museum of Ireland. Once the process has been completed the anchors are expected to be unveiled in public locations in both Cobh Town Centre and Fenit Pier in Kerry in time for the massively anticipated 2016 centenary commemorations of the 1916 Easter Rising in Ireland. Fenit Port was where the ship should have docked to unload the deadly cargo onto train cabooses. The Aud’s anchors, rifles, bullets and ship’s wares will one day be on permanent public display to honour the memory of the Aud and its crew.

   The Aud was commissioned by Sir Roger Casement in Germany during World War One to deliver to Ireland a cargo of 20,000 rifles, five million rounds of ammunition, machine guns and explosives to be used by Padraig Pearse for the War of Independence in Ireland. Unfortunately, Roger Casement was unable to transfer onto the Aud at the assigned moment in Tralee Bay due to his u-boat developing a diving fault at sea. Instead he was cast ashore in a small dinghy onto the now famous Lonely Banna Strand. The Aud remained steadfast despite no party to rendezvous with it and was eventually attacked by British warships. Royal Navy sloops and destroyers forced the Aud into the seas off the Cork coastline where her commander, Captain Karl Spindler, decided to blow up his own ship rather than let her cargo of German weapons fall into British hands. He and his crew were taken prisoner and were kept in POW camps until 1919. They became the only Germans to ever suffer for Irish freedom.

   Of course, we are well schooled on what happened to Padraig Pearse, James Connolly and Joseph Plunkett during 1916. They were forced into making a blood sacrifice with a handful of men against superior forces after Eoin MacNeil sent countermanding orders out to the Irish Volunteer body. MacNeil had reacted badly on learning that Casement had been arrested in Kerry and that the expected German ship full of guns for the Rising had been lost. Only for the Aud and her crew springing into action – the Easter Rising would not have gained the massive sympathy formed by the Irish psyche following the insurrection’s aftermath. Our history would have turned out totally different. Independence, Irish freedom in the form of the Republic of Ireland may never have ever been achieved.

   “Finally, Roger Casement, the Aud and her crew will get the recognition for their selfless struggle and sacrifice when the anchors at last break the surface once again.” Mr Clayton concluded. “I have been honoured to have escorted Fred and John Schmitz out to the recovery vessel to witness the so recognisable components of their grandfather’s ship at last reappearing into daylight. The men were treated to a week long stay at the beautiful country lodge Eccles Hotel in Glengarriff courtesy of the Hanratty family who have supported the whole enterprise. Mr Clayton then spent a week making certain the men received the highest honours from the Mayor of Tralee, John Wall. They visited the Magharee Islands where the Aud’s anchor last dropped while awaiting Roger Casement. Signalman Friedrich Schmitz was the last man to leave the sinking burning ship before she went down. It is very fitting that these two gentlemen have travelled all the way back to Ireland to witness this historic event. It was their own grandfather who had played a direct hand in initiating all of this almost a century ago.”

   Aer Lingus kindly sponsored the visit of the Schmitz dignitaries to our shores so that they could be given a full Irish welcome and recognition of their grandfather’s sacrifice for Irish freedom. The Schmitz’s will be treated to various ceremonial functions and gatherings from the town councils of Cork and Kerry following the great historic event.

**Caption**: Aud anchor raising team including front row left to right: Timmy Carey, George AleXander Clayton and Leader

Eoin McGarry