**PART I REVIEW BY JEFFREY DUDGEON IN DUBLIN REVIEW OF BOOKS (drb) 2013 OF ANGUS MITCHELL ARTICLES IN FIELD DAY REVIEW 8 2012**

**CASEMENT’S WAR**

**[1914-1916 in Germany and Ireland]**

**Part I *Casement’s War*, Issue 31, 25 March 2013**

[**http://www.drb.ie/essays/casement-s-war**](http://www.drb.ie/essays/casement-s-war) (w**ith references footnoted)**

**[Part II *Casement Wars*, Issue 36, 4 June 2013 (not present here)**

[**http://www.drb.ie/essays/casement-wars**](http://www.drb.ie/essays/casement-wars)**]**

**FIELD DAY REVIEW 8. 2012**

* **‘A Strange Chapter of Irish History’: Sir Roger Casement, Germany and the 1916 Rising by Angus Mitchell.**
* **Diary of Roger Casement, 1914–16, Part I: ‘My Journey to the German Headquarters at Charleville’, annotated by Angus Mitchell.**
* **‘A last Page of My Diary,’ 17 March to 8 April 1916, with an introduction by Angus Mitchell[[1]](#footnote-1).**
* **‘Phases of a Dishonourable Phantasy’ by Angus Mitchell.**

This edition of the *Field Day Review* (published by the University of Notre Dame, Indiana) is beautifully presented and exceptionally well produced. On the cover and flyleaf are evocative photographs of Banna Strand where Casement landed in April 1916 and Murlough Bay in the 1890s and 1953 during Eamon de Valera’s visit.

Murlough Bay was to be Casement’s final resting place, a mile from his adopted home near Ballycastle but, short of partition ending, cannot be. Despite his efforts, the division of Ireland is nearly a century old, Northern Ireland’s frontier being one of the longest standing in Europe. The memorial cross to Casement (and others) at Murlough’s “green hill” was torn down in 1957 during the IRA border campaign which was quite eventful in the area. Little of it remains.

The four items under review are two transcriptions from Casement’s German diaries, introduced and annotated by Angus Mitchell, and two substantive articles by him on the German episode and the diary authenticity debate and its history. Together they run to 125 pages.

Mitchell has not entered the authenticity debate before at such length, previously publishing books on Casement’s 1910 and 1911 Peruvian Amazon investigations – in the form of transcribed documentation, and a short biography which avoided the diary issue. Indeed he has been largely silent since 2000 when, “acting on the advice of several senior Irish academics I had decided to remove myself from the controversy rather than engage with every new polemical development”[[2]](#footnote-2). This came just after reviewing “the McCormack and Dudgeon books” in, it has to be said, in my case anyway, a highly dismissive manner, as a “queer reading…serving the cause of gay unionism.”

The imminent centenary may be the reason for discarding that censorious and career minded admonition, but off the leash Mitchell certainly is, after a decade of relative silence.

From the off, he asserts that, “Independent Ireland has found it hard to incorporate into its foundational history the [Casement] narrative.” [[3]](#footnote-3)However this is difficult to credit given Casement’s state funeral and reburial in 1965 and the fact that Ireland has fairly faithfully pursued his foreign policy ideas since 1921. The diaries have obviously created difficulties but until the advent of modern deniers they had been glided over.

The first transcription[[4]](#footnote-4)following an introduction[[5]](#footnote-5) is Casement’s report of a brief trip into Belgium, ostensibly to discuss the suborning of Irish POWs with Baron Kurt von Lersner, a diplomat he had met in New York. Interestingly Lersner was later categorised a *Mischling ersten Grades* and sent to the embassy in Turkey. And secondly, Baron Wilhelm von Stumm a pro-war diplomat, who was at the Belgian outpost of the German Foreign Office in Charleville. The German difficulty, never quite resolved, was that they could not distinguish between Irish and English prisoners.

Casement’s diary is like an article by an embedded war correspondent, readable and packed with telling detail. He honestly reports seeing the graves at Andenne where the German Army in August had executed 350 Belgian civilians in a semi-disciplined operation, partly prompted by panic over *francs tireurs*.

Why he was shown these sights is not clear. Mitchell says Casement’s guide, Count von Lüttichau of the German General Staff (GGS) “had orders” to take him on a detour to witness conditions. However a more intriguing explanation is that his companions chose to display these embarrassing scenes in the (vain) hope that he would grasp the dreadful nature of the war.

This is borne out by Casement writing[[6]](#footnote-6): “Lüttichau begged me to try and get thro’ my interview with von Stumm by 10.30 a.m. so that we might return by Dinant, Namur and Liège. This, a much longer route back to Cologne would be far more interesting as we should pass thro' some of the most famous spots of the opening stages of the war.” Again, later, his English-speaking chauffeur Meckel, “a well known German automobilist and aviator” simply “stopped the car to show me a gruesome sight and tell a horrible story.”

Casement also notes the devastation of large parts of Liège and Louvain by German forces and details the many destroyed bridges in France and Belgium, adding that sometimes the damage was self-inflicted or the bridges were wrecked by the retreating armies. He tries to justify his new ally, the German Empire, by expatiating on how the Belgians were getting just reward for their war crimes in the Congo[[7]](#footnote-7):

“Sometimes I must confess when the present ‘Agony of Belgium’ confronts me – and it cannot well be minimised it is in truth a national agony – I feel that there may be in their awful lesson to the Belgian people a repayment. All that they now suffer and far more, they, or their king, his government and his officers wreaked on the well nigh defenceless people of the Congo basin. And with no such reason as the Germans. Germany offered Belgium fair terms – she asked only a “right of way” to meet her foemen face to face on French soil. Belgium refused – at the instigation of England and preferred the arbitrament of arms.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

And of course this is the essence of Casement’s endlessly repeated standpoint, of British war guilt – a case worth arguing and one Mitchell does take forward but not by describing it as “Casement instinctively dismantling the colonial hierarchy of humanity”. When couched in Casement’s and Mitchell’s moral and Anglophobic tones, it loses its force and audience. There is however useful mention of the issue of secret treaties as a cause of the war on which Casement’s great political ally E.D. Morel campaigned in the Union of Democratic Control.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Angus Mitchell discusses clearly, if in a partisan manner, the ‘Rape of Belgium’, the German atrocity issue, averring that Casement was uniquely well placed “to critically evaluate the official investigative practices into German atrocities in Belgium.” (Casement did evasively concede in his diary, “Wrongs were undoubtedly committed in Belgium but they were not all committed by Germans upon Belgians.”[[10]](#footnote-10))

Mitchell then picks on Professor J.H. Morgan, a lawyer solder and prolific war author and investigator for London. Because he (openly) advised Casement’s legal team in 1916, he is seen as part of the “secret history of Casement’s trial.” Morgan, like the Ulsterman James Bryce who reported for the government on the German actions in Belgium, was a Liberal patriot. People can have mixed or layered opinions without being in a conspiracy.

The author cannot resist adding the claim that King Leopold’s casualties were “as high as the death toll of the 1st World War.” [[11]](#footnote-11) He of course references Adam Hochschild book for this ludicrous claim but not the work of Professor Roger Louis, a Congo population-loss sceptic (no census was taken), or the recent work of Aldwin Roes, particularly *Towards a History of Mass Violence in the Etat Indépendant du Congo, 1885-1908* which views Leopoldian rule critically but fairly.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In discussion with Baron von Stumm,[[13]](#footnote-13) Casement tellingly explained, “I told him of my larger hope – ‘a dream if you will’ – of an independent Ireland emerging from this war and he at once said it would be to Germany's interest to have an independent Ireland. I said ‘Yes – to the interest of Europe at large.’”

Casement linked the matter pithily to London’s offer of Home Rule: “In return for a partial promise to allow Ireland to erect a debating society on the banks of the Liffey at some wholly unspecified future date, Irishmen today are to give 300.000 men to the shambles in France and Flanders in order that the Englishmen, who is too valuable himself to be put in danger may “capture the German trade.””

Co-incidentally, or perhaps because we travel the same narrow street, albeit on opposite sides, I have also transcribed the same German documents as Mitchell, but in their entirety – while interpolating some of Casement’s correspondence.

I too recognise Casement’s time in Germany, the months of nervous breakdown aside, as hugely significant for Ireland and England, and especially apposite now the 1914-16 centenary years are approaching.

The German episode has great dramatic potential which the rest of his too varied, and too sexual life militates against, the trial aside, and that lacked a certain tension, with the verdict a foregone conclusion. At the same time most *parti pris* Casement art and writing has been marred by too sugary a treatment, one that frequently is, or becomes, religious.

The issue of war guilt and war avoidance, not to mention how to end wars also looms large but these articles bring no guidance and little insight. Mitchell none the less performs a valuable service through the transcriptions by making us address the nature of Casement’s actions in Germany and his arming of the Volunteers in 1914 and 1916. He runs through the literature on Ireland and the Great War cogently.

That Casement recoiled from the actual Rising has greater significance than noted. Here he is “despairing of the imminent project of a rising,” indeed trying to subvert it. Next he says it will be abortive and “a crime they [the Germans] will pay for bitterly.” John Devoy however in the Gaelic American of 4 October 1924 judged differently, “Casement impugned the good faith of the Germans as to the quantity and quality of military supplies and asked that the Rising be postponed. The charge of bad faith was wholly unfounded.”

Like Edward Carson, perhaps more so, Casement militarised Ireland. Mitchell admits as much, saying that after he retired on ill-health grounds, “His energies were then channelled into the Home Rule crisis and the paramilitarization of Irish politics”[[14]](#footnote-14), as if that was an achievement. Casement’s view here of the Irish Volunteers as “excitable young men” reveals only irresponsibility. Get young men guns and they will use them, and of course they did.

In Ulster’s case, the young men went off to the Somme. In later years from 1970, deserted by the upper class and abandoned by the middle they joined paramilitary groups which, thereby, lacked officers, something Casement felt the Irish Volunteers also did. The results were inevitable and not pleasant.

The extracts seriously condemn Casement who latterly rails against a weak German offer of support in endless, inane and silly writing. They also reveal why he wrote the Black Diaries: his writing is a substitute for conversation. It is plainly a process of talking to himself and recording his thinking in ceaseless and increasing self-justifying rage. Mitchell admits[[15]](#footnote-15) “at times Casement’s inner reflections border on the paranoiac.”

Not so. Not paranoid, but hysterical, and I think the behaviour of someone who can only be oppositional, until doubt sets in and they become conflicted.

Or was he all emotion as Joseph Conrad memorably wrote of him in May 1916 (to John Quinn)? “He was a good companion but already in Africa I judged that he was a man, properly speaking, of no mind at all. I don't mean stupid. I mean that he was all emotion. By emotional force (Congo report, Putumayo – etc) he made his way, and sheer emotionalism has undone him. A creature of sheer temperament – a truly tragic personality, all but the greatness of which he had not a trace. Only vanity.”

There is a central gap or flaw in Casement’s reasoning which made him a limited thinker. He here denies Germany the right to interests, just as he, previously, and Republican dissidents today, deny England its interests. Ireland, in contrast is above having interests and Casement like modern anti-revisionists is self-righteously and unyieldingly critical of its enemies for such a sin. Every state has interests, even the Irish, but Casement (and his crony Alice Stopford Green) was relentless in denying England any; everything is exploitation of the weaker by the strong, nobody has free will.

Casement’s greatest achievement in his first months was the statement he obtained from the German Chancellor in November 1914, “The Imperial Government formally declares that under no circumstances would Germany invade Ireland with a view to its conquest or the overthrow of any native institutions in that country. Should the fortune of this great war, that was not of Germany’s seeking ever bring in its course German troops to the shores of Ireland, they would land there not as an army of invaders to pillage and destroy but as the forces of a Government that is inspired by goodwill towards a country and people for whom Germany desires only *national prosperity and national freedom*.”[[16]](#footnote-16) Within three weeks of his arrival in Germany, he had effected the greatest of diplomatic advances, one similar to Wolfe Tone’s in Paris – diplomatic recognition of an independent Ireland.

In his birthday congratulations to the Kaiser of 29 January 1915, Casement was expressing his gratitude by praying “for the righteous triumph of German arms” and earlier when voicing annoyance at the then comparatively low level (57,000) of British losses[[17]](#footnote-17).

But later in the extract he complains of the “curse of Prussian militarism,” that the Prussian system was the “embodiment of soulless efficiency,” of the “coarse and selfish heads of this Prussian abortion,” virtual blockheads who were “incapable of understanding the minds of other men…collectively a great nation, individually – an undesirable one.”

Mitchell under-explains all this by saying that the Germans had “lost sympathy with his cause,” although Casement wrote “their only interest in me lay in exploiting me & the Irish cause.” As if it wouldn’t be.

This Declaration was followed in December 1914 by the formal Treaty with Zimmermann which opened, “With a view to securing the national freedom of Ireland, with the moral and material assistance of the Imperial German Government, an Irish Brigade shall be formed from among the Irish soldiers, or other natives of Ireland, now prisoners of war in Germany.”

It is ironic and remarkable that the same man should, only fifteen years earlier, have been advising the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, in March 1900, of “frequent allusions to ‘downtrodden Ireland’ which appeared from time to time in the *Standard & Diggers News* in connection with the so called ‘Irish Brigade’ … a runlet of Johannesburg tapsters and cornerboys swelled by driblets of Continental ruffianism.” This was a possible reference to his future colleague in 1916, Major John McBride.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Formation of the Irish Brigade in Germany, which took up the next year, was however a disaster. Casement managed to get only 50 recruits and they were in no sense reliable (one Timothy Quinlisk was executed in Cork in February 1920 as a British agent) while his foolish attempts to get the Brigade to Syria were viewed with horror by John Devoy in New York: “Fighting for the Turks would be a fatal cry in Ireland.” He was also concerned with Casement’s “indiscreet talk”[[19]](#footnote-19). Amongst others made aware of the coming Rising was the “politically biased English-born”[[20]](#footnote-20) Princess Blücher. In her case, she voluntarily handed Casement’s incriminating papers over to British Intelligence after the war.

The second transcription[[21]](#footnote-21) is entitled ‘A Last Page of My Diary,’ being in the original 134 pages long. It tells of Casement’s final three weeks from 17 March before he, Lt. Monteith and one other Irish POW, Sgt. Daniel Beverley (chosen by Monteith) leave for Ireland. Those weeks were spent in a state of rage, depression, frenetic writing and bitter arguments with the GGS. His army contact, Rudolf Nadolny was, understandably, apoplectic[[22]](#footnote-22) when he discovered that Casement, with the assistance of the Admiralty, had sent John McGoey (who had recently arrived from the US) via Denmark to try and get the Rising called off because of poor German support.

It is actually quite remarkable that Casement was not immediately arrested, as was his old colleague Bulmer Hobson in Dublin in April when the IRB feared he was up to the same trick. Hobson was never forgiven unlike Casement. And it is even more amazing that the German Admiralty “the best part of all this show – a long way the best”[[23]](#footnote-23) finally provided a submarine to transport him to Ireland to arrive in time, as he thought, to block the Rising.

Had the Admiralty not been so silly as to provide a submarine – persuaded Casement said for German reputational reasons – he would have survived the war and entered Irish politics in 1918 on a par at least with Eoin MacNeill and probably much more significantly, and certainly by 1921 a negotiator in chief. Unfortunately this aspect of the last days in Berlin goes largely without comment or analysis by Mitchell. Irish revolutionaries on German submarines, one notes, have a poor outcome.

U-19, the first ever German diesel submarine, was to arrive in Tralee Bay just a few hours after the arms ship *Aud*. It also failed to find the promised pilot. What Casement apparently never knew was that Captain Weisbach had been ordered, as the Aud’s Captain Spindler wrote, that “under no circumstances however must a landing occur before April 20th [Thursday] in the event of a premature arrival.” Thus Casement would only ever have had hours to get to Dublin to persuade MacNeill (and the IRB) to abandon the action. The Germans seem to have tricked Casement as there was no point in sending him separately if the vessels’ timings were designed only to ensure he made a rendezvous with the *Aud* in Tralee Bay. It seems the two German services, as ever with armies and navies, were not acting in concert but this key puzzle goes unanalysed by Mitchell.

Perhaps the most interesting part of this story is the fate of Casement’s companions on U-19, and of John McGoey. Robert Monteith, who was a Cavan Protestant farmer’s son, and a Connolly socialist, managed to evade capture in Kerry, making it back to the US. Not unreasonably, he did not participate further in the Rising but did in US socialist politics.

In his diary on 10 April, ever loyal to Casement, Monteith wrote: “I must move quickly as my time is short. I am now driven, I can use no other word, to embark on what I believe to be the wildest enterprise in the history of Europe, and it is in my opinion a deliberate cold blooded attempt to get rid of Sir Roger Casement and myself, under the pretense of helping our country ... I believe Sir Roger Casement, Sgt. Beverly and myself are going straight to our death with our hands tied, without even hope of being able to raise a hand to defend ourselves, and fools think we cannot see through their treachery—or let me be charitable, want of foresight…Without me and perhaps without Beverly the world will move along in the same way, but in Sir Roger Casement, the world loses one of her best and greatest men.”[[24]](#footnote-24)

Beverley was using a nom de guerre. He was actually Daniel Julien (sometimes Julian) Bailey, a Dubliner from St Michans with a French mother (named Berthelier). He evaded capture in Kerry a day longer than Casement and after giving various other names offered a statement to the RIC. He was eventually charged and brought to trial at the Old Bailey.

His fate was not settled until after sentence of death was passed on Casement. Contrary to Mitchell’s note[[25]](#footnote-25) that Bailey/Beverley “turned King’s Evidence,” he didn’t give court evidence, or reveal much more than the British knew or what Casement himself told the Kerry police and Scotland Yard.

Bailey’s statement denied personal culpability and foreknowledge of the operation. Omitting most salient facts, he said he had only participated with a view to getting home. His most significant remark, duly ignored by the authorities, was, “I heard that Dublin Castle was to be raided.” His statement was however read out in court by F.E. Smith, the Attorney General and Carson’s ‘Galloper.’

After Casement had been taken down, Smith surprised the court by dropping the charges against Bailey. He said he “was a private soldier of humble origin” who had made a statement on his arrest when he said that he was not, and never had been, a traitor to this country or the Army. “He had joined the Irish Brigade with one object only – namely, to return by a subterfuge to the Army. He wanted to escape from the hardship and inactivity of his captivity. It was impossible to know what the motives might be which actuated a man – inference and conjecture were the only guides.”

The Attorney added he had come to the conclusion that the evidence was inconclusive; therefore it was necessary to look at his Army record. “Bailey had served nine years, six of them abroad. His record was uniformly good. In these circumstances he had taken on himself the responsibility of deciding not to test the defence which the accused would have put forward. He did not think it right merely to enter a nolle prosequi, but to offer no evidence, so that the jury might enter a verdict of acquittal.”

This seems very much a personal decision by the Galloper, probably to ensure the focus on Casement was not lost or diffused, and otherwise to prove his humanity in relation to the common soldier. Bailey then disappears from view, that is until a recently released record in Kew.[[26]](#footnote-26) It dealt with a concern expressed in 1918 by the Hon. Miss Anne MacDonnell of the Irish Woman’s Association that Bailey had become a Captain in the British Army!

The rumour was stated to be “groundless and mischievous [as] Bailey is now a Private in the Railway Operations Department, Royal Engineers and serving in Egypt.” Earlier in a peculiarly English mode, there is a record of the police in 1916 watching a Mrs O’Dea, a widow “educated in Germany” described as engaged to Bailey and “a fast woman.” She had two sons in the Army and it was ascertained that her sympathies were “entirely British.”

Full and further details of Bailey (and his medals) have since been made available on David Grant’s website, one oddly unmentioned by Mitchell.[[27]](#footnote-27) It carries an amazing amount of Irish Brigade documentation particularly in the form of birth, marriage and death certification, war records and news cuttings. Bailey died in Ontario in 1968 having migrated to Canada in 1921, but only after another marriage, in 1926, to 18-year-old Clara Nash. His first wife, Katherina O’Dea died in 1924 aged fifty.

John McGoey’s story is even stranger. Stated by nationalist writers to have been executed by the British in Scotland, he never resurfaced after leaving Germany. Mitchell says[[28]](#footnote-28) that he remained “something of a mystery” and that “different rumours surround his fate.” He conceded however that “more recent research [unspecified] suggests he survived the war.”

The question that remains is whether he was too late getting out of Denmark or, more likely, decided to disobey Casement’s orders. He had the power to stymie the Rising but didn’t. Which is not to say he couldn’t be a quick worker. Last seen en route to Denmark in late March, by September 1916 he was marrying a Miss Ethel Wells in Essex while serving on an armed merchant cruiser, HMS Kildonan.

Perhaps McGoey believed the Rising should go ahead and he was disillusioned with Casement’s demoralising machinations, despite telling him “he had sized up German militarism.” Or perhaps because of that militarism, he had decided to cross over to the other side while securing and preserving his own freedom. He certainly never sent the card marked ‘off’ from Denmark that Casement so desperately awaited.

Sadly McGoey was to die in a building accident on the Chicago Tribune Tower in 1925, leaving Ethel a widow with one child.[[29]](#footnote-29)

Lives lived are often more complicated and interesting than conspiracy theories. What Angus Mitchell cannot say however is that British Intelligence was really quite flatfooted, something “the archive” tellingly reveals.

At the end of his first article, he reminds the reader “of the suspect nature of official evidence and of the vulnerability of the historical record to such typical acts of intellectual treason.”[[30]](#footnote-30)

He has become Casement.

[Part II, ‘Casement Wars,’ will address Angus Mitchell’s last article, ‘Phases of a Dishonourable Phantasy,’ on the history and literature of The Black Diaries, and their authenticity.]

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1. This part goes unmentioned on the *Field Day Review* page headings. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. p. 110 - et seq. page numbers refer to all the Angus Mitchell articles in *Field Day Review* 8. 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. p. 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. pp. 22-46 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. pp. 5-21 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. p. 30 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. p. 15 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. pp. 15 & 37 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. p. 31, n. 21 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. p. 18 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. p. 15, n. 25 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Aldwin Roes, <http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/74340/2/roesAW2.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. p. 31 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. p. 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. p. 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *The Continental Times*, 20 November 1914 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. p. 41 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. TNA FO 2/368/280-283 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. p. 51 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. p. 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. pp. 47-83 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. p. 61 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. p. 75 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. <http://www.irishbrigade.eu/recruits/monteith/monteith-germany-diary.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. p. 69 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. TNA MEPO 2/10668 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. <http://www.irishbrigade.eu/recruits/bailey.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. p. 54 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See David Grant’s website for more on McGoey: <http://www.irishbrigade.eu/other-men/goey/goey.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. p. 21 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)