***Insider Knowledge***

**By Paul Hyde**

**decoding-casement website**

<http://www.decoding-casement.com/insider-knowledge/>

(Also published in the Irish Political Review November 2020 over 7 pages with a letter from Jeff Dudgeon in the December issue of IPR alongside a further Hyde item)

 ***‘Everything secret degenerates … nothing is safe that does not show how it can bear discussion and publicity.’*** Lord Acton

**1**

On 10th January, 1966, President De Valera received an envelope postmarked Hampstead, London. The typed letter within was read to him by his secretary, Máire Ni Cheallaigh, since De Valera was at age 84 almost blind. The writer was a freelance photographer whom De Valera had met some nine months earlier on the historic occasion of the state funeral for Roger Casement. His name was Kevin MacDonnell, a native of Mayo, who wrote as follows:

*‘I was informed by an ex- British Naval Intelligence source, whose name I cannot reveal, that the Casement Diaries were fabricated by his chief, Admiral Hall. He has had the matter on his conscience ever since and though he has great respect for Hall in all other ways he feels this was an evil piece of work.*

*I feel you should be the first person to be given this information. I will never forget your kindness and hospitality when I came across last year with Mr Angeloglou, the Picture Editor of The Sunday Times, to photograph you.’*

De Valera responded on 18th January; *‘With regard to the other matter, the important thing is to get some positive proof. Nothing else will suffice. I understand you intend visiting Dublin again soon … I would like to see you.’*

MacDonnell responded on 22nd January; *‘Regarding the Diaries, I am trying hard to obtain names, dates, in short, proof, but my source of information fears he has told me too much already. However, he may put me in touch with other people who worked with Hall and they may be willing to talk. I shall be in Dublin on the 27th, 28th and 29th of this month … and I hope you will be able to see me …’*

Attached to that letter in De Valera’s file is an A4 page with the following typewritten; ‘Casement’s Diaries. Commander Clipperton – special friend of journalist Kevin McDonald – can give information. He worked under Hall.’ Since De Valera could not type, the spelling error of McDonald for MacDonnell is probably a mishearing by his secretary in dictation. At the top of the letter from MacDonnell the words ‘Commander Clipperton’ are handwritten in what might be a woman’s hand. [Also on 7 January letter ‘Basil Thompson’] From these facts, it is reasonable to infer that MacDonnell did meet De Valera and revealed the name Clipperton to him at that meeting. It cannot be determined if De Valera made further enquiries or if he requested such enquiries. ‘Everything secret degenerates … nothing is safe that does not show how it can bear discussion and publicity.’ [1](http://www.decoding-casement.com/insider-knowledge/#easy-footnote-bottom-1-921)

On 17th January MacDonnell had dispatched another letter to a close friend in Dublin, Padraig Ó Snodaigh. He explained how, on a visit to a friend’s weekend house on the Sussex coast, he had met a neighbour there, an elderly retired naval officer, Commander Clipperton.

*‘Obviously a bit lonely, he drops in now and then, usually without phoning first, to have a beer and talk endlessly about his days in the Navy. Most people look on him as a deadly bore, but I am fascinated by the animal brutality of life in the Navy even as late as the twenties and thirties as revealed by him. He really has been all over the place and knows a hell of a lot.*

*‘In the course of conversation with Sheila and I the subject of Ireland cropped up. “I worked at one time with Admiral Hall” he said. “He was a very clever man indeed. Brilliant. But he was unscrupulous. Though in many ways I admired him, he shouldn’t have fixed Casement in the way he did. He fabricated the Diaries, you know, and that was an evil thing to do.” I expressed mild surprise and he said “Yes, he did it. Just a few of us knew about it. But do you know, it was a very funny thing, much later on in the last war Intelligence put me on the job of bringing a charge against Hall’s son who was mixed up with a group of other young officers —-.” He went on to tell us how he tapped the phones, etc, and how Hall’s son was killed in a raid just before charges could be brought.’*

MacDonnell’s letter does not say when this conversation took place but the content suggests sometime in 1965 and very probably the ‘subject of Ireland’ was in fact the state funeral of Casement on March 1st that year in Dublin. The repatriation of his remains had received wide press coverage in both England and Ireland. MacDonnell confirms in a letter written 30 years later that *‘The name Roger Casement cropped up in the course of casual conversation.’* It is reasonable to infer that it was this recent historic event which focused Clipperton on Hall that day in 1965. The letter to Ó Snodaigh then reports that when Clipperton realized MacDonnell had press connections and was Irish, he *‘became very agitated indeed’* and declared that he had said too much. MacDonnell wrote that he had not seen Clipperton since that conversation. Later MacDonnell’s friend who owned the weekend house told him that Clipperton had subsequently raised the matter with him and was very anxious that nothing should come of it.[2](http://www.decoding-casement.com/insider-knowledge/#easy-footnote-bottom-2-921)

**2**

This writer has with considerable difficulty identified Commander Clipperton. Sydney Robert Clipperton was born on 28th December, 1898 in Stalham, Norfolk, the youngest son of Robert John Clipperton, a police officer who rose to the rank of inspector with the Norfolk Police. Young Sydney joined the Royal Navy in 1914 at age 16 and served some twenty-four years until his retirement from the Navy in 1938. On the outbreak of WW2, he joined the Home Guard with the rank of major and in 1940 married Evelyn M. King in Kent. By 1958 Clipperton had retired and taken up residence with his wife in Fairlight, near Hastings on the Sussex coast. Photographs show a substantial detached house built in the 1920s in its own grounds; the address is The Thatch, Cliff End, Pett Level Road, Fairlight, near Hastings.  It was a residential area close to the coast favoured by retired business people, ex-service personnel, returned expats. Clipperton was listed in the East Sussex telephone directory of the period. He died in Hastings in October 1969 aged 71.

Clipperton’s Navy record shows his service number as J.31169 and records him as ‘School boy’ from May 1914. Unfortunately the official record seems incomplete and is very difficult to decipher and interpret. However, it is clear from his record that he was a telegraphist and that he was awarded two medals; the S. G. C. (?) and gratuity on 23 .3. 1932 and the Royal Victoria Medal (silver) on 1. 11. 1934. Among the ships he served on in the 1930s were HMS Canterbury, HMS Frobisher, HMS Sussex.[3](http://www.decoding-casement.com/insider-knowledge/#easy-footnote-bottom-3-921) Evidence from two distinct sources confirms that he became a commander later in his career.

In the early decades of the 20th century radio-telegraphy was a ‘hi-tech’ profession in both military and commercial contexts. It required above average intelligence and was accordingly highly paid. Indeed, Navy telegraphists were petty officers and enjoyed various privileges. It also required considerable discretion since they transmitted and received confidential and often top secret information. The British were at the forefront of perceiving the vital importance of and then developing what became known as signals intelligence – SIGINT – especially in military and diplomatic contexts. The new communications technologies of telegraphy and radio were vitally important and those trained specialists were an élite. During WW1 they were an essential asset. In 1914, the very distinguished Sir Alfred Ewing who had scientific expertise in this field was recruited into Naval Intelligence by his friend Admiral Oliver. His remit was to establish an elaborate nationwide signal interception system and a decrypting unit in Admiralty Old Building. Thus Room 40 was born two months before the arrival of Captain Hall. [4](http://www.decoding-casement.com/insider-knowledge/#easy-footnote-bottom-4-921)

The legend of Room 40 grew long after the war during which it was a top secret operation. The legend is largely journalistic and is somewhat misleading. In fact, Room 40 refers to a number of offices within Admiralty Old Building which occupied several hundred employees. Forty-four year old Captain Hall (later Admiral) was Director of Naval Intelligence Division from October 1914 to 1919. An eclectic group of mostly civilians was recruited to Ewing’s decrypting operation. They included linguists, academics, lawyers and an actor, a wine merchant, a future clergyman and a stockbroker. Hall’s deputy from 1917 was another naval man, Commander William James who later became an admiral and much later Hall’s biographer.

Hall was a remarkable man with a facility for ‘bold, unconventional’ thinking. Charismatic and sociable, he was also  an ingenious master of deception, a devout imperialist of ‘strong convictions’ with a suitably uncomplicated moral mentality. He was universally known as ‘Blinker’ Hall because of the intensity of his eye nictitation, which had a semi-hypnotic effect in conversation. He became a Conservative MP in 1919 and was the mastermind behind the 1924 forgery of the so-called Zinoviev letter which purported to call on British communists to influence the Labour Party to sign a treaty with Russia. With industrial leaders he founded the shadowy National Propaganda organisation which countered suspected communism in British industry. [5](http://www.decoding-casement.com/insider-knowledge/#easy-footnote-bottom-5-921)

Professor Eunan O’Halpin writes of Hall; *“Doubts about his reputation arise in three respects: his propensity to take unilateral initiatives on foot of diplomatic and political intelligence produced by Room 40; his frequent disinclination to place intelligence in the hands of those departments best placed to judge it; and his involvement while a post-war politician in anti-government intrigues drawing on his old intelligence connections. Like many able intelligence officers, he sometimes succumbed to the professional temptation of manipulating good intelligence in order to influence the decisions and actions of the government which he served”.*[6](http://www.decoding-casement.com/insider-knowledge/#easy-footnote-bottom-6-921)

Hall was both a maverick and a Machiavelli, utterly fearless and determined in all he undertook. Admiral James, his biographer and former colleague, confirms the extent of Hall’s influence; ‘ … a man whose name and fame spread to every seat of government in both hemispheres … a man to whom Cabinet Ministers turned when in difficulty … ‘ capable of ‘exercising a decisive influence on political affairs’ including ‘affairs that were the sole concern of the Foreign Secretary.’ What Admiral James calls ‘his unorthodox methods’ and his constant personal control over information and secrets made many apprehensive of him so that upon his retirement in 1919 ‘Inside the Admiralty there were many who would not mourn his departure.’[7](http://www.decoding-casement.com/insider-knowledge/#easy-footnote-bottom-7-921)

Ruth Skrine, Hall’s personal secretary later wrote; *‘the Machiavelli in him could be cruel, and the ‘means’ he used often ‘justified the end’ in many a battle he fought in the murky world of Intelligence.’*

Hall had friends in business and politics, in the press and in gentlemen’s clubs and he enjoyed access to the highest in political power including the monarch. [8](http://www.decoding-casement.com/insider-knowledge/#easy-footnote-bottom-8-921)Often described as a genius, his was a genius with a distinctly sinister cast. US attaché Edward Bell said he was *‘a perfectly marvellous person but the coldest-hearted proposition that ever was – he’d eat a man’s heart out …’*

An anecdote related by Hall himself testifies to his ruthless audacity. Angered by a lenient sentence imposed on a captured German spy, Hall treacherously fed the judge’s home address back to German Intelligence alleging it was a military target. The house was bombed soon after but the elderly judge survived and later innocently related his narrow escape at a dinner with Hall present. [9](http://www.decoding-casement.com/insider-knowledge/#easy-footnote-bottom-9-921)

Hall was seen to be on the side of the angels but was not himself of their number. His determination to capture and destroy Casement was evident from 1914 onwards and was relentless. That he was deeply involved in the diaries scandal is confirmed by his biographer Admiral James; *‘Though at that time there were not more than a dozen men who knew, or guessed, that Hall had circulated the Casement diary, they included men holding prominent positions who had sworn vengeance against him for making the disclosure.’*[10](http://www.decoding-casement.com/insider-knowledge/#easy-footnote-bottom-10-921)Admiral James did not know that what was in fact shown (not circulated) were police typescripts allegedly copies of unseen diaries.

**3**

Some misunderstandings must be cleared up. Kevin MacDonnell was not as described in the De Valera Papers, a journalist. He was a freelance photographer who worked for the press, not a reporter. Secondly, his description of Clipperton as a Naval Intelligence source is misleading. Clipperton did not serve with Naval Intelligence; he was a naval telegraphist, not an intelligence officer. Thirdly, the expression reported by MacDonnell that Clipperton ‘worked with Hall at one time’ is misleading in as much as it suggests a close, regular working relationship. There is no documentary evidence for such a relationship between Hall and Clipperton. It is probable that in claiming this, Clipperton was enjoying some reflected glory in his retirement years. In the year of the diaries scandal, 1916, he was an eighteen year old radio telegraphist.

Kevin MacDonnell was born in Mayo in 1919 but his family transferred to London in 1922. He was educated in England and became a well-known and successful freelance press photographer. He also wrote for many years regular articles on photography for the popular *Photography* magazine. He also worked in theatre photography and advertising and in addition he published a number of photography books and manuals. He was known to be affable and was well liked. Further information on his personality and career can be found at [onlinedarkroom.blogspot.com/p/kevin-macdonnell](http://onlinedarkroom.blogspot.com/p/kevin-macdonnell).

There is strong evidence to show that in 1965 MacDonnell was not especially interested in the Casement controversy and was poorly informed. His letter to Ó Snodaigh indicates a superficial familiarity gained from René MacColl’s unsympathetic biography which was reissued as a mass market paperback in 1960 and again in 1965. [11](http://www.decoding-casement.com/insider-knowledge/#easy-footnote-bottom-11-921) Moreover, MacDonnell was not an admirer of Casement, writing of him; ‘He is not my favourite character and must have been a hell of a handicap to the revolution, poor devil.’ Indeed MacDonnell’s interest at that time was in Michael Collins about whom it appears he had hoped to write a biography. Although the Black Diaries had been available for inspection (with Home Office permission) since 1959, it is clear that after six years MacDonnell had not seen them or even requested to see them. He also seems unaware of Alfred Noyes’ 1957 study *The Accusing Ghost*. [12](http://www.decoding-casement.com/insider-knowledge/#easy-footnote-bottom-12-921) His antipathy towards Casement was inevitably coloured by his reading of MacColl’s book and by the disturbing shadow of the diaries scandal upon a traditional practicing Catholic. [13](http://www.decoding-casement.com/insider-knowledge/#easy-footnote-bottom-13-921)This evidence indicates that in 1965 when he heard Clipperton’s remarks about Hall and the diaries, MacDonnell had minimal interest in Casement and felt uncertain and uneasy about him. [14](http://www.decoding-casement.com/insider-knowledge/#easy-footnote-bottom-14-921)

**4**

In late February, 1998, Kevin MacDonnell by then aged 78 took a number 24 bus from Hampstead into central London. After a journey of just over an hour, he alighted in Pimlico and made his way to the house of historian Angus Mitchell, the Casement scholar who had recently edited *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement.* In the introduction to this book Mitchell had stated his conviction that the Black Diaries were forged. [15](http://www.decoding-casement.com/insider-knowledge/#easy-footnote-bottom-15-921)

MacDonnell was talkative and affable and the meeting lasted about an hour during which he related his encounter with Clipperton almost thirty-three years before. Mitchell was familiar with the names MacDonnell and Clipperton which he had earlier seen in the De Valera papers.

Some days later MacDonnell wrote to Mitchell to say that he had found, after a long search through old files, a notebook he had kept after meeting Clipperton in 1965. MacDonnell enclosed a typed copy of some notes from this notebook. This copy is an undated A4 page with the following text typed at the top: ‘B. R. Clipperton, MVO, DSC, RA eventually commanded HMS Violent.’  [16](http://www.decoding-casement.com/insider-knowledge/#easy-footnote-bottom-16-921) Below this header there is a list of Hall’s staff in two parts comprising his ‘assistants’ and his ‘helpers’, eighteen names in all.  Curiously, some of these names are followed by familiar details; James Randall is described as ‘a wine merchant’, Ralph Nevill is described as “Club man”, H.B. Irving is described as ‘son of Henry’, Claude Serocold is described as ‘city man and yachtsman’. Perhaps most significantly, Hall’s personal secretary Ruth Skrine is also referred to as ‘Mrs Hotblack’, her later name by marriage. These added details strongly indicate that the source of these names had personal experience of these people. MacDonnell wrote in his letter to Mitchell that he could no longer recall the source of this list but that he was sure it was not Clipperton. [17](http://www.decoding-casement.com/insider-knowledge/#easy-footnote-bottom-17-921)

If the source of these eighteen names and details had known the individuals personally, it could only be someone who had worked in the ‘Room 40’ operation since that operation was top secret and remained so for many years. And since MacDonnell obtained the information copied to Mitchell *after* his encounter with Clipperton, he obtained it from a living source in 1965 or 1966. The principal living source at that time was Admiral William James who had indeed worked with Hall and had at times deputised for him. In 1955 Admiral James published the only biography of Hall, *The Eyes of the Navy.* [18](http://www.decoding-casement.com/insider-knowledge/#easy-footnote-bottom-18-921)

All eighteen names cited in the list copy-typed by MacDonnell are mentioned in the James biography of Hall and many are cited with the details given in that list. This fact cannot be a coincidence if the term is to retain any semblance of meaning. However, in the biography those names are cited randomly in the text whereas in the typed list nine are categorised as ‘assistants’ and nine as ‘helpers’. This distinction between two categories of those close to Hall cannot be derived from the biography. There can be no doubt that the source of MacDonnell’s list was Admiral James himself and not his biography. Having determined that James was the direct source of the information typed on that single page by MacDonnell, we have also determined that James was the source of the header referring to Clipperton and his medals and to his command of HMS Violent.

Research into the history of this ship confirms that it was launched in 1917 and was scrapped in 1937. In the period up to 1929, no less that twelve commanders were appointed and Clipperton does not appear in that list. Of these twelve commands, the first lasted only two weeks, another two lasted only four or five weeks, and another two lasted around four months. This writer has attempted to find an explanation for such brief appointments. Research reveals that the post of lieutenant commander is considered a junior rank and such officers are not considered to be commanders. Eleven of the twelve commanders of the HMS Violent up to 1929 were in fact lieutenant commanders. There is also evidence that the post of lieutenant commander was often nominal and was related to prestige and/or promotion and historically this was the case for non-commissioned officers such as Clipperton.  This suggests that a deserving officer might be given a command for a period merely in order to upgrade his curriculum.  He might never step on board the vessel in his command. The anthropology of the Royal Navy in the past shows evidence of both a growing meritocracy and more traditional class-influenced factors. It is therefore possible that Clipperton in the late 1930s was promoted to lieutenant commander as a short-term nominal post in recognition of his service medals and approaching retirement.  (Captain Hall himself became admiral only upon his retirement. His elder son became a lieutenant commander five years *after* his retirement.)

Forces War Records online provides the following information.  ‘[Sydney R](https://www.forces-war-records.co.uk/records/7033242/leading-telegraphist-sydney-r-clipperton-hms-violent/) [Clipperton](https://www.forces-war-records.co.uk/records/7033242/leading-telegraphist-sydney-r-clipperton-hms-violent/) J.31169 1914 Royal Navy Leading Telegraphist 1918 Hms Violent’.  The year 1918 here refers to his role as telegraphist as verified by his official service record. The reference to HMS Violent refers to his command of that vessel, albeit perhaps nominal, as confirmed in the copy list obtained from Admiral James. Further confirmation of his rank as commander comes from his rank as major in the WW2 Home Guard; an army major is the exact equivalent of a navy lieutenant commander.

**5**

At this point a scrupulous and impartial analysis requires an examination of the following possibility; that Kevin MacDonnell invented his report of the crucial conversation with Clipperton.  If this is the case, then Clipperton did not state that Hall had ‘fabricated the Diaries’ and did not state that Hall’s son had been under investigation and had been killed in a raid. By this hypothesis, these aspects were invented by MacDonnell. However, it cannot reasonably be doubted that MacDonnell did meet Clipperton in Sussex on a number of occasions. If the content of the conversation was invented, such an invention would have a motive which ought to become evident from MacDonnell’s behaviour following the invention, from how he exploited the story.

However, it is difficult to determine a plausible motive if only because MacDonnell’s correspondence reveals both a lack of prior interest in and sympathy for Casement. As explained above, he was at this time poorly informed about the controversy which fact *indicates an absence of prior motivation*. Logically, motive precedes action; voluntary action requires prior motivation.  Furthermore, his behaviour indicates that he did not know how to verify the story and he certainly failed to do so.

Without a credible motive there are sound reasons for excluding the hypothesis that MacDonnell invented the Clipperton story partly or wholly. These are:

1 – He related the encounter and the revelation in a three-page letter to a close friend in Dublin asking for advice. It is improbable that he would seek to deceive a trusted friend.

2 – He related the revelation in a letter to and at a meeting with President De Valera. It is improbable that he would seek to deceive a head of state whom he obviously respected.

3 – He made efforts to investigate Clipperton and discovered his command of HMS Violent and his father’s police profession. It is not credible that he tried to externally verify a story which he himself had invented.

4 – Some 32 years after his correspondence with Ó Snodaigh and De Valera, at the age of 78 MacDonnell travelled across London in 1998 to inform Angus Mitchell of the Clipperton conversation. It is not credible that he would persist after such a long time with a story he knew to be invented.

5 – The antipathy he felt towards Casement is incompatible with the invention of a story favourable to Casement’s reputation.

The invention of the Clipperton story would require experience of unscrupulous and *professional* deviousness which intelligence services excel at – indeed, they have given ample evidence of such activities. MacDonnell had neither motive nor such capability. The above grounds and his reactions recorded in his correspondence support the definitive conclusion that MacDonnell is not a weak link in this history

**6**

Having documented the real existence of Clipperton and his residence on the Sussex coast in 1965, it is necessary to scrutinize the statements about Hall attributed to him by MacDonnell which he reported to De Valera and to Ó Snodaigh. Verification proceeds by seeking to falsify what is said to be true. In this case MacDonnell stated that a *conversation about Hall* took place with Clipperton. It is vital therefore to first verify or falsify this assertion. The conversation as reported had two aspects; the reference to Hall and the Diaries followed by the reference to the sudden death of Hall’s un-named son during WW2. Verification of either aspect would demonstrate that a conversation with Clipperton about Hall took place. Since the purported death ought to be independently verifiable, this aspect can be examined first.

Incontrovertible evidence for the sudden death in WW2 of Hall’s elder son, Jack, comes from Admiral Hall himself.  Hall had two sons both navy officers. In 1974 Richard, the younger, deposited family papers in The Churchill Archives at Cambridge University. Among those papers there is an undated letter by Admiral Hall; ‘Dick just rung me up to tell me that Jack has been killed at Aberdeen; apparently in an air raid he in to try and rescue some one and was killed by falling masonry; Dick is now getting full details and I have to told him that our Jack has no wife, I should like him buried up there; as you know I don’t like funeral bake meats; legally speaking I suppose I am his nearest relative as Mary has control of Pt. I like to think the lad may now be with Essie again’**.** It is not clear to whom this is addressed but the addressee is someone in or close to the family. This is followed by a letter to Hall from Admiral Robert Raikes (Flag Officer in Aberdeen) expressing sympathy for the loss of his son. Dick is Richard, Mary is unidentified and Essie might be a pet-name for Hall’s wife Ethel who died in 1932. [19](http://www.decoding-casement.com/insider-knowledge/#easy-footnote-bottom-19-921)

While this is sufficient independent verification of the death, it does not demonstrate that Clipperton was MacDonnell’s source of this fact in 1965. However, the death of his older son is not mentioned in Hall’s 1955 biography by his former colleague Admiral James. Therefore this book, available to MacDonnell, was not the source.  Likewise, the family papers were not the source since these were private until 1974. Two 1942 Aberdeen newspaper reports of the death and funeral cannot have been the source either since discovery of these required prior knowledge of the death of Hall’s son in WW2. There is no reference to Hall’s family in his *The Times* obituary of 23 October 1943.

All possible sources being eliminated it follows that MacDonnell learned about the death from Clipperton. This is sufficient to demonstrate that the conversation with Clipperton was about Hall. It also verifies MacDonnell’s report that he was told about the death by Clipperton.  Therefore to the five reasons listed above this externally verified fact can now be added as number 6 – his report of the death of Hall’s son after a raid in 1942 as related by Clipperton is verified.

That the *preceding* conversation was about Hall cannot reasonably be doubted since Clipperton had no cause to relate the death of Hall’s son apropos of nothing at all. The remark about the death of Hall’s son was made in the context of prior remarks about Hall.  There is no independent documentary evidence to verify that Clipperton worked ‘at one time’ with Hall which is the premiss of MacDonnell’s report of the conversation. That the latter aspect concerning Hall’s son has been demonstrated as true does not demonstrate the truth or falsity of what was purportedly said before about the diaries. At best it contributes to the *probability* that the prior diaries remarks are also true.

The immediate context of Clipperton’s statement about the death was his role in an investigation into unspecified activities involving Hall’s son. This demonstrates that some four years after he had retired from naval service, Naval Intelligence contacted the then Major Clipperton in 1942 with a commission to carry out secret interception relating to Hall’s son. This is a remarkable fact with highly significant implications. That an obscure forty-four year old retired officer who might have been forgotten was entrusted with such a task indicates that he had not been forgotten by Naval Intelligence. It further indicates that in 1942 Naval Intelligence knew Clipperton had the technical expertise necessary for such interception work and that they could rely on his discretion. It is a fact that telecommunications technology had considerably advanced in the quarter century since the First World War. Nonetheless, Intelligence knew that Clipperton was both technically up to date and experienced in such work. This indicates that Intelligence knew Clipperton had accumulated interception experience during his career in which case Clipperton’s name was recorded in Intelligence files. He had not been forgotten. Nonetheless this interception experience cannot be found in his official service record.

Scrutiny of that record reveals further anomalies; it shows that he was allocated to onshore training establishments: HMS Ganges, HMS Impregnable, HMS Vernon and HMS Pembroke1. It appears that his first sea-going experience was on the HMS Iron Duke from 29th June 1916 until 15th February 1917. According to the record he was in continuous service onshore and at sea from 29th May 1914 until 16th January 1923, a period of eight and a half years, without any break recorded for shore or home leave. Clearly this interpretation of the record cannot be correct. Yet another interpretation produces three gaps between allocations which amount to some thirty months before 1st March 1918. The record does not show where he was during these gaps.  In particular there appears to be a gap from 3 May, 1915 to 29th June, 1916, a period of circa fourteen months which might have included a secondment elsewhere. The official record is of very limited use for determining Clipperton’s movements during the period.

Since the reference to the 1942 death of Hall’s elder son has been demonstrated to be true, the earlier part referring to MacDonnell being told that the diaries were fabricated by Hall remains to be examined for truth or falsity. It remains to be seen if *external* verification can be found for this. To this end, eight words cited by MacDonnell deserve particular scrutiny because of what they imply. *‘Just a few of us knew about it.’*  This indicates that the knowledge – ‘it’ – was at that time shared between a small group of persons and was not exclusive to the speaker. The ‘us’ referred to in that brief sentence indicates a shared identity and can only refer to a category of *colleagues* rather than an indiscriminate group of persons. Of that unidentified category, only a small number shared the ‘insider knowledge’.  Research has demonstrated that Clipperton was a telegraphist, a communications technician. The category which ‘us’ refers to is therefore the category of telegraphists. At the time of the conversation in 1965, MacDonnell certainly did not know this. Indeed, there is no evidence in his correspondence that he ever knew Clipperton had been a telegraphist.  That sentence does not indicate that Clipperton communicated the knowledge to a few colleagues but rather he *was aware* that the knowledge was shared by some colleagues. Either they discovered the knowledge independently of each other or they were informed of the discovery and shown the evidence.

MacDonnell reported in his letter of 17th January 1966 that Clipperton’s knowledge was shared by others whom MacDonnell assumed to be Room 40 intelligence staff. This spurred him to contact Admiral James, a known authority and author of Hall’s biography, with hopes of learning the identities of Clipperton’s colleagues.  Obviously he could not ask the Admiral to confirm that Hall had ‘fabricated the Diaries’; there would have been no response. On 22nd January, MacDonnell wrote to De Valera; *‘Regarding the Diaries, I am trying hard to obtain names, dates, in short, proof … he [Clipperton] may put me in touch with other people who worked with Hall …’* James supplied him with a list of eighteen names of those close to Hall and Clipperton’s name was not listed.  It is this attempt to *externally verify* the identities of his colleagues which demonstrates that MacDonnell was indeed told by Clipperton that *‘Just a few of us knew about it’* where ‘it’ refers to Hall and the Diaries. If MacDonnell had not been told by Clipperton that he had *‘worked with Hall’* and *‘a few of us knew’* that Hall had *‘fabricated the Diaries’*, he had nothing to research and no questions to ask Admiral James or anyone else. It is untenable to propose that MacDonnell invented ‘the few of us’ *ex nihilo* and then, knowing this was false, hoped that Admiral James would verify his invention.

It is clear that MacDonnell’s question to Admiral James mentioned Clipperton’s name otherwise James would not have identified Clipperton as he did. It is also clear that MacDonnell asked for the names of Hall’s colleagues otherwise James would not have given the list of names in Hall’s circle.

Thus also the first aspect of MacDonnell’s report of the conversation is logically and definitively demonstrated as true – he was told by Clipperton that Hall had ‘fabricated the Diaries’.

This confirms that MacDonnell was told by Clipperton as reported but that fact does not confirm the truth of *what he was told*; Clipperton might have been lying. Against this, however, there is Clipperton’s stated admiration of Hall which conflicts with such a malignant lie. Although there are no grounds for holding that Clipperton was lying, this possibility must nonetheless be examined.

Independent corroboration from his colleagues – the ‘few of us’ – would suffice to prove he was not lying but they remain unidentified. However, MacDonnell reports that after revealing the fabrication ‘He [Clipperton] … became very agitated indeed. He said he had told me much more than he should have done … I quietened him down and I haven’t seen him since …’ Therefore, if Clipperton was lying his agitation would be feigned. It is not credible that he would choose to feign agitation rather than simply deny or even revise his statement and describe it as mere opinion or hearsay. His agitation serves to confirm that he was telling the truth.  Moreover, if feigned, his theatrical agitation was a futile and counter-productive *charade* which served only to *demonstrate* to MacDonnell that he had indeed told the truth. Further confirmation that his agitation was genuine and spontaneous comes from the fact that MacDonnell never saw him again after the revelation. Therefore no grounds can be found to support the hypothesis that Clipperton was lying.

The following aspects have now been verified; 1 – that Clipperton was a telegraphist and later a naval commander; 2 – that he spoke about Hall with MacDonnell; 3 – that he told MacDonnell about the death of Hall’s son; 4 – that he told MacDonnell that others knew of Hall’s fabrication; 5 – that MacDonnell later received a list of Hall’s close colleagues from Admiral James; 6 – that Clipperton told MacDonnell the truth.

***7***

That Clipperton existed has been demonstrated and that he reached the rank of lieutenant commander has been demonstrated. MacDonnell did not publish anything about the Clipperton story and his rudimentary research failed to clarify the link between Clipperton and Hall during WW1. Nonetheless MacDonnell remained convinced of its truth over thirty years later in 1998, shortly before his death in 2001.

This writer has been unable to find documentary evidence of Clipperton’s service with Hall. It is quite possible that such evidence does not exist. Clipperton’s reported claim that he *‘worked with Hall’* is misleading; many scores of people in Admiralty Building ‘worked with Hall’ if only in the sense that he was Director of Naval Intelligence. Clipperton was merely a young telegraphist during WW1, not a naval commander. A secondment to Admiralty Old Building as a telegraphist during an unexplained gap in his service record would not have been registered as intelligence work within the ambit of Room 40. (The fact that he did later become a lieutenant commander is not recorded in his service record.)

MacDonnell’s report of the conversation shows that Clipperton did not say how he learned of the plot. It is wise to avoid speculation however tempting. That MacDonnell himself did not speculate later on this aspect indicates that he did not know that Clipperton had worked as a telegraphist. Thus MacDonnell remained under the misguided impression that Clipperton had been an intelligence officer close to the inner circle of the Room 40 operation. This erroneous impression explains also why his attempts to corroborate failed. The pool of telegraphists in the basement of Admiralty Old Building was the nerve centre whose role was to send and receive telegrams both coded and in English, to receive radio intercepts from the hundreds of Y stations throughout the UK, to intercept encrypted communications from German and neutral sources, in short to deal with all telecommunications. [20](http://www.decoding-casement.com/insider-knowledge/#easy-footnote-bottom-20-921)

This author has spent five months stress-testing MacDonnell’s report of what was said, for veracity. This is the first and only analysis of the almost unknown Clipperton story. It has been conducted with the maximum rigour and impartiality and the conclusion is reached by process of *natural* deduction. This article is as much about the methodology of this analysis as it is about the conclusion. The author presents this analysis as comprehending historical inference to the requisite standard which is that it leaves no reasonable doubt of its truth. (This is a different standard from that of proof beyond all reasonable doubt, or proof on the balance of probabilities – favoured by lawyers; or proof by deduction and induction favoured by philosophers, scientists and mathematicians.)  This truth is wholly corroborated by the fact first published as *Dis-covering Casement* in Village, October 2016, where it was demonstrated *beyond reasonable doubt* that there is no evidence for the material existence of the bound diaries in 1916 since only police typescripts were shown.

These two demonstrations taken together leave no reasonable doubt that the Black Diaries were fabricated and that Captain Hall was the mastermind behind the plot. In plain words, MacDonnell, a man with no interest in and little time for Casement, found himself by chance listening to *insider knowledge* spontaneously related to him by a man who otherwise admired and esteemed Hall but who after almost fifty years felt that ‘this was an evil piece of work’. Indeed this was the crime of an ‘honest Iago’.

***‘There are many events in the womb of time which will be delivered*.’ Othello, Act 1, Sc. iii.**

**Post-script: A ‘Smoking Gun’**

Those who require what is commonly called a ‘smoking gun’ to overcome their belief in authenticity (which usually poses as uncertainty), do so knowing full well that their request can never be met. The ‘smoking gun’ is conceived to be *sufficient* and no further evidence or testimony is needed for judgment. But this is a misconception deriving from confusion between circumstantial evidence and direct evidence. *The ever-popular ‘smoking gun’ is itself a proof from circumstantial evidence and* *is not a direct proof*. It is a common misconception that it constitutes the strongest proof. It is also a common misconception that circumstantial evidence is qualitatively inferior to direct evidence. It is a fact that in the absence of direct witness evidence, the vast majority of cases are judged on the quality of circumstantial evidence.

We must presume that a satisfactory ‘smoking gun’ would have to be a written, signed confession from Admiral Hall of his guilt. No other document would suffice. While confessions can be extorted, forged or made to protect the true culprit, there is no such document and there never was. It is axiomatic that intelligence services do not provide smoking guns in the form of written confessions. It is therefore *irrational* to require one in this case. However, the request is made in *bad faith* in order to conceal that it is a strategy intended to declassify the accumulated evidence against authenticity as permanently insufficient and to set it aside. To ask for evidence which is known to be *non-existent* is therefore an *evasive tactic* intended to exclude due consideration of the evidence presented; as such it is a motivated refusal to examine the merits of the case. No evidence will be sufficient, none save the non-existent but misunderstood ‘smoking gun’.

The motive for the evasion can be found in the fact that the evidence against authenticity is vastly superior in quality and quantity to the evidence for authenticity, much of which has been *demonstrated* to be false, therefore inadmissible.

**Notes**

1. The MacDonnell-De Valera correspondence is in the De Valera Papers at UCD. Ref P150/3608
2. MacDonnell’s letter to Ó Snodaigh is in NLI. Ref Ms. 18776.
3. Clipperton’s naval record is held by The National Archives UK. Ref ADM 363/50/115; ADM 188/709/31169.
4. The legend of Room 40 largely ignores the founding role of Professor Sir Alfred Ewing who was appointed on August 4, 1914 on account of his knowledge of codes and decrypting. Ewing was the principal recruiting officer for Room 40 which was under his leadership until 1917 when he ‘handed over command to Admiral Hall’. In 1927 the 72-year-old Ewing broke the tacit secrecy rules and gave a public lecture on his Room 40 experience. He was at once rebuked by the Admiralty; only the fear of negative publicity prevented his criminal prosecution. Publication of his lecture was banned until 1979. The text is now online. His son’s biography, *The Man of Room 40,* *The Life of Sir Alfred Ewing* (1939) tells the complete story.
5. The antipathy he felt towards Casement is incompatible with the invention of a story favourable to Casement’s reputation.
6. The Missing Dimension, pp 54-77. *British Intelligence in Ireland*, *1914-1921.* Eunan O’Halpin. Andrew C., Dilks D. (eds) Palgrave, London, 1984.
7. *The Eyes of the Navy*, Admiral William M. James. 1955, Methuen.
8. *ibid*.
9. Cited in *Aaronsohn’s Maps* by Patricia Goldstone. Counterpoint. 2015. Also cited in *Room 40* by Patrick Beesly, 1983.
10. *The Eyes of the Navy*, Admiral William M. James. 1955, Methuen.
11. *Roger Casement: A New Judgment*. René MacColl. Hamish Hamilton, 1956.
12. *The Accusing Ghost or Justice for Casement*, Alfred Noyes. 1957, Victor Gollancz.
13. Evidence that MacDonnell was a lifelong practicing Catholic is found in his letter to Angus Mitchell of March 1998 where he indicates that he still, at age 78, observes Lenten abstinence.
14. Evidence of disinterest is found in MacDonnell’s letter to Ó Snodaigh which indicates that he held to the long discredited Normand translation theory of the origin of the diaries. Moreover, MacDonnell reveals his poor opinion of Casement with ‘he got a kick out of reading it [the translation]. He carried it around with him for this reason.’ In his letter to Ó Snodaigh, MacDonnell refers to the farmer and the holy well, a detail mentioned only in MacColl’s biography.
15. *Amazon Journal*, foreword by editor Angus Mitchell. Lilliput Press, 1997. This is the only publication of Casement’s 1910 diary relating in detail his experience in the Putumayo. It contains no compromising references. The very long handwritten original is held in NLI.
16. The error in the initial B for S is in the header of the page typed by MacDonnell. It is possible that the error was made in a handwritten original by Admiral James who was about 84 years old in 1965. It is also possible that the error of transcription was made by MacDonnell.
17. MacDonnell’s letters to Mitchell are held by the recipient and were generously copied by him to this author. Details of the 1998 meeting in London were also provided by Mitchell to whom the author is indebted.
18. *– The Eyes of the Navy*, Admiral William M. James. 1955, Methuen. The only biography of Hall revealed that he was responsible for the showing of the police typescripts purporting to be official copies of the Black Diaries.
19. Churchill Archives reference is HALL 7/4 7/133. The text is cited verbatim; the small errors were made by Hall.
20. The British built up great expertise in the new field of signals intelligence and codebreaking. On the outbreak of war, Britain cut all German undersea cables. This forced the Germans to use either a telegraph line that connected through the British network and could be tapped, or through radio which the British could then intercept.  An interception service known as [‘Y’ service](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Y-stations), together with the [post office](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Post_Office) and [Marconi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marconi) stations grew rapidly to the point where the British could intercept almost all official German messages.