**TRALEE CASEMENT CONFERENCE**

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**[As given.**

**Footnotes in another version]**

**Jeffrey Dudgeon**

**Casement and the Easter Rising: Berlin, Dublin and British Intelligence**

The story of who knew what in April 1916, and why pretty well all parties failed in their allotted tasks is worth retelling, even if it deromanticises many of the players, and diminishes some of their reputations.

The main political question is why did British Intelligence fail to avert the Easter Rising, given their intimate fore-knowledge, allied to why, if Casement was so determined to get it, at least, postponed, did the Germans let him go to Ireland at all, knowing what they did?

Failure of course also bred success in revolutionising southern Ireland and developing its founding myth. Without Easter 1916, an Irish Free State would still have been born, but separatism might not have been so radically successful.

There are a number of other Casement mysteries, or disputed facts in 1916, over and above the authenticity of the diaries. Many questions also surround the second rank players. Some have recently been resolved – at least partially.

I instance the increasing information that has come to light on Casement’s four key colleagues – his companions in Germany, and on the submarine – Adler Christensen, Robert Monteith, John McGoey, and Daniel Julien Bailey (with the nom de guerre of Beverley), all of whom ended their days in north America. Living as they did along the edge of legality, their stories have not surfaced easily.

In Christensen’s case, the mystery has been advanced to 1929 when, as recently advised by his grandson, he was in Vancouver, and shortly to desert Hedwig, his third, and probably second concurrent wife. She was a German girl he had married a year earlier in Winnipeg.

Sergeant Beverley of the Irish Brigade – a man also captured in this town – entered the Old Bailey dock after Lord Chief Justice Isaacs passed sentence of death on Casement. At the surprising request of the Attorney General, F.E. Smith, he was duly found not guilty by the jury. After recall to the British Army and serving in former German East Africa and Egypt, he emigrated to Canada, dying in Ontario in 1968.

It would be wrong to say he betrayed Casement, not least because Casement was informing the authorities in Tralee, and most everyone else, of the imminent Rising. Indeed Beverley was far from frank with his local interrogators about the details and purpose of the mission, despite his, not unreasonable, efforts to escape the gallows. His motives seem mixed, much as McGoey, although he was no sociopath like Adler.

Captain Monteith, having escaped capture in Kerry, and after a lengthy period in hiding – an adventure story well told in his book and as thrilling an account as those in the Bureau of Military History – made it back to the US, dying in 1956 in Detroit.

He remained a faithful admirer of Casement, telling of a meeting in New York in 1917, *“*When I made the statement that Casement did not sail with the intention of stopping the Rising, Devoy interrupted me with a vehement and vicious denunciation of Casement, charging him with selling-out and unspeakable crimes on the unsupported word of Adler Christensen, whom Devoy himself described as: “One of the worst I ever met and who was in the pay of the English all along.” (p. 232, *Casement's last adventure*)

This is a misinterpretation of Casement’s motive. Devoy’s view also that the raid on the New York offices of the German spy Wolf von Igel yielded the information to enable Casement’s capture was erroneous. Details only reached London after the event.

The greatest mystery surrounds John McGoey, a Scots-Irish man based in the US, who could have changed history had he followed Casement’s orders. His mission was to go to Denmark, and thence Dublin to warn Tom Clarke and Bulmer Hobson of the lack of German support for a Rising.

Instead McGoey somehow reached England and, of all things, joined the Royal Navy while managing to marry – all within six months of leaving Berlin. [See David Grant’s Irish Brigade website for many intriguing details of this band of rogues – <http://www.irishbrigade.eu/> ]

Casement wrote at the time on 18 March 1916: “McGoey was brought in next day – I explained all the situation to him very fully and pointed out the imperative need of trying to get some one into Ireland to warn them there of the wholly inadequate help being given and to say that I strongly urged no “rising.” He (like Monteith) was with me here. McGoey said it would be criminal and that he had long suspected the Germans of playing a double game. He would do anything I asked him to. I told him it was necessary for me to keep silent as to my real opinions before the G.G.S. [*Grosser Generalstab*] and that when I took him to the Admiralty he must do the same.

We went at 11.30 o'clock and found the three Captains again – all was explained to John McG. He is to go as an added string to our bow (in addition to the telegram to Devoy) to tell the Dublin Council to have the pilot boat ready at Inishtooskert &c. &c. – but he goes really to try and get the Heads in Ireland to call off the rising and merely try to land the arms safely and distribute these.”

Ten days after McGoey left Berlin on 19 March, Casement was cross-examined by the GGS. He diaried:

“Their fear was that I had sent John McGoey to stop the rising! They asked again and again if I had given him instructions to that effect. I said I was not the master of the Irish Revolutionary body and whatever I might say would only be advice or suggestion. I avowed that John McGoey himself was dead against a rising, and the fury was uncontrolled.” (NLI MS 5244)

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

So what happened to him between April and September, when, despite Casement’s notion and that of many Republicans, he had obviously not been executed by the British in Kirkwall?

Did the Germans prevent him leaving mainland Europe before the Rising? This was something I reasonably assumed, not believing the secret hanging theory, given that the Military knew Casement had despatched McGoey to sabotage their efforts, soon after they discovered the Admiralty had enabled him to travel.

Did he decide not to jeopardise the Rising and ignore Casement’s orders? Did love of an Englishwoman get in the way of his duty? Perhaps he decided to switch sides after experiencing the Germans close at hand.

We can deduce his loyalty to Irish separatism must have been – or have become – sufficiently shallow for him to join the Royal Navy. He was plainly not averse to military involvement.

People are less ideological, more changeable, and more buffeted by events than we give them credit for.

McGoey died in Chicago in 1925 in a building accident, taking his story to an early grave.

However the key question remains, knowing of his mission, and once the GGS knew Casement had been granted, by the Admiralty on 7 April, his repeated request for a submarine, why did they allow it or at least, ensure the orders about landing were not tighter to minimise his ability to thwart matters? Indeed why did the Admiralty give in to Casement’s request for a submarine?

Was it a desperation to get rid of him or did Casement pull sufficient of his many strings in Berlin? Séamas O Síocháin in his biography suggests “They may have felt, though, that he had a better chance of evading capture in travelling by submarine.” (p. 438)

We do know that the orders for U20 included:- “Headquarters attach importance to getting the Irish ashore at the last possible moment.” Karl Spindler indeed emphasised this remarking: “Worthy of special attention is Paragraph (5) [of the Captain’s orders] according to which no matter what happened, the landing of Sir Roger much in advance of the outbreak of the revolution was to be prevented.” (p. 202-3, Spindler, *The mystery of the Casement ship*)

Was the reason a lack of imagination or Prussian blockheadedness, something Casement came to acknowledge in so much of the German High Command, or the fog of war? This question is one that might be answered by closer inspection of the German-language archives.

Another is the precise origin and family of Casement’s mother Anne Jephson, a north Dublin Protestant from Portland Street (and a parishioner of St George’s Anglican Church in Hardwicke Street), but that must be left to another day. Instead I turn to British intelligence.

The events in the week before the Rising took place on the Monday, and the consequences of each change of mind or plan are involved and convoluted. But they all served unexpectedly to serve the interest of the inner junta of the IRB who were determined on a Rising – except initially for Casement’s capture.

It was London’s intelligence mishandling that in the event minimised the harm his capture was going to do. Hindsight is of course a clear guide.

The decisions of Captain Blinker Hall, head of Naval Intelligence in Room 40, aided on the day by Basil Thomson of Scotland Yard and Frank Hall of Narrow Water Castle in Warrenpoint (M.I.5’s ‘Q’, and former military secretary of the UVF) ensured the Rising happened and ultimately succeeded. In essence, London denied Dublin the necessary knowledge that should have made them take effective precautions against the imminent outbreak of rebellion.

Hall knew through the decoding of German cables from their Washington Embassy the fact of a rebellion; its date; the despatch of Casement and of an arms shipment to be landed in the Limerick area. By taking him immediately to London, Dublin Castle was again deprived of an opportunity to hear of the plans for a Rising.

David Ramsay in his hagiographic biography, *Blinker Hall – Spymaster* wrote, “The inept Chief Secretary for Ireland, who had held the post for far too long (nine years) and who reputedly seldom visited Dublin, lost his job. But Hall as the de facto co-ordinator of intelligence and Thomson must share some responsibility for the failure to pass intelligence to the RIC, one of the most serious intelligence breakdowns in British history.” (p. 135, 2008)

That Ramsay wrote such searing criticism proves Hall was far from flawless and when he worked with Thomson and Frank Hall – three good old boys very much of a kind – the danger was compounded.

Eunan O’Halpin tells much the same story when he wrote, “Hall was anxious above all to avoid disclosing his source, decrypted German messages; in so doing he jeopardised the security of Ireland.”(p. 59, *The Missing Dimension:* *British Intelligence in Ireland 1914-21*, 1984)

Hall’s secrecy in relation to the Rising had another cause – his view that “politicians were as leaky as sieves”. He thus restricted the details to naval personnel in particular.

We have recently learnt that Margot Asquith and of course her husband, the Prime Minister, were aware of the intelligence. (BBC Radio 4 *Document* programme, 11 March 2013) Indeed the whole Cabinet may have been informed by Arthur Balfour, the First Lord of the Admiralty, his source being Sir Henry Oliver, the Naval Secretary (p. 134, Ramsay, *Blinker Hall’ – Spymaster* 2008).

This however has not been confirmed and seems unlikely in that Birrell was plainly not *au fait*. Asquith discounted the intelligence, apparently as he had heard so much of a similar nature. But why bother with intelligence if you simply ignore it? Stopped up sieves are more useless than leaky ones. And Asquith was averse to action.

George Dangerfield catches it well, “Captain Reginald Hall, possibly deep in Room 40 of the Admiralty may have permitted himself a twinge of uneasiness. If he had allowed Mr Birrell and Sir Matthew Nathan to know what he knew, and by what means he had come to know it, things might have gone differently. But Captain Hall, even if he had wished to speak, was obliged for security reasons to remain silent. And so the Birrell administration was thrown to the wolves.” (p. 248 *The Damnable Question* 1976)

Dangerfield adds that Birrell and his deputy Nathan, “pursued their policy – on the whole a very sensible one – of “minimum action and maximum inaction” Why stir up trouble in that excitable land?” (p. 161, ibid) This masterly inactivity some called appeasement, and, as it always does, leads in time to a crisis.

Blinker Hall was a very political intelligence chief, as many are or become. He also lacked common sense and was possessive of his secrets. There is a pattern of him keeping them too secret as at the Battle of Jutland. The one occasion where he broke his own rule was after the deciphering of the Zimmerman telegram which by drawing the US into the war changed everything, and ensured victory for the Entente powers. Blinker knew well this one secret had to be distributed even at the risk of alerting the Germans to his code breaking.

The informational cascade and its variations is complex with many names and dates.

Blinker Hall told General George Macdonogh, Director of Military Intelligence, on 22 March of a rebellion due to start on 22 April and of an arms landing. He in turn advised Lord French, Commander in Chief of the Home Forces, citing only “an absolutely reliable source”. (Dangerfield p. 160)

Dangerfield writes, “Lord Wimborne and Mr Birrell, who met with French in London that day, were not told anything at all…On the whole, Captain Hall would have chanced a rising all over Ireland rather than give the Germans an inkling of the truth – that their coded messages were being read.” (p.160-1)

General Lovick Friend, the Army Commander in Chief in Ireland, was then advised on 23 March, a month in advance of the rising but not of the unimpeachable source.

Replying to General Friend on 10 April, but without being told of the intelligence, Matthew Nathan wrote, “I do not believe the leaders mean insurrection or that the Volunteers have sufficient arms if the leaders do mean it.” (O Broin ‘*Dublin Castle’* and p. 24, Spindler *The mystery of the Casement ship*)

This has the ring of a conversation with Alice Stopford Green, given her friendship with Nathan and Birrell. They judged her low “in the hierarchy of treason.”

Sir Matthew was not inclined to listen to southern Unionists who warned him of mounting trouble and advised of a need for drastic measures, as they would, he probably thought. In particular their leader, Lord Midleton, who wanted the Volunteers proscribed was disregarded, yet his sister the Hon. Albinia Broderick (*Gobnait Ní Bhruadair*) lived in Kerry in a Gaelic League and Volunteer milieu.

Midleton therefore had to have some better feel for what was developing than the Castle and its complacent or nationalist advisers. He was aware that an administration that permitted an alternative and opposing locus of military power was asking to be subverted.

Despite being the political head in Dublin, Nathan was not given direct knowledge of any of the key intercepts until 17 April, the Monday of Holy Week. General Friend, the top soldier in Ireland, showed him a letter that day which he had received from Brigadier-General Stafford in Queenstown on foot of a casual conversation with his naval counterpart Admiral Lewis Bayly.

“As Nathan recounted to the Royal Commission, it told of a “contemplated landing from a German ship rigged up as a neutral and accompanied by two submarines, of arms and ammunition on the south west coast with a view to their reaching Limerick and of a rising timed for Easter. (p. 7, Cmd. 8311).” (p. 477, Dudgeon, *Casement - The Black Diaries*)

The RIC chief was informed while Nathan and General Friend did agree to arrange for “armed pickets of 100 men to be nightly available at each of the four main barracks,” a contingency that seems to have provided no cover of any value, if it ever happened.” He was still so unconcerned he brought his sister-in-law Estelle and her children over for Easter. They were staying at the Under-Secretary’s Lodge in Phoenix Park (along with Dorothy Stopford, Alice Green’s niece) where Mrs Nathan was to be trapped and terrified for five days. Friend notoriously went on leave.

The Royal Navy knowing more than the military and political powers did take precautions although they were not effective. Here I particularly rely on Xander Clayton’s monumental book *The Aud*. Clayton who lives nearby has tracked down and published much original naval material, not least the secret orders from Admiral Bayly to the blockading cruiser squadron off the west and northern coasts (p. 68-69, 14 and 16 April)) warning of an Easter rising and an arms landing.

The Navy’s alertness however was not so keen as to unmask the *Aud*. It was stopped early on Friday morning (21st) by *Setter 2* (or *Shatter* as Spindler wrote), an outpost trawler commanded by a civilian Aberdeen fisherman named John Donaldson. He and his admittedly outnumbered boarding party were tricked by Spindler, despite being several hours on the ship, and even telling the supposed Norwegians that intelligence had them on the lookout.

This failure can be regarded as critical since it delayed knowledge of the ship’s German origins for twelve more hours. Indeed that certainty only came from the Fenit naval base officer after he visited the RIC barracks in Tralee. Details from the questioning of Casement and Beverley filtered only gradually, and late, to Dublin Castle.

Taking Casement to London was however the final mistake that ensured the Rising was not snuffed out in advance. This and his execution also ensured he would not end up disgraced, as happened to his ally and fellow rising-sceptic Bulmer Hobson.

Some questions have been answered here, others remain for further research but the mysteries lessen.all would have chanced a Rising in Irewwww