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British Intelligence Operations During the Anglo-Irish War

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BRITISH INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS DURING THE ANGLO-IRISH WAR

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by

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ABSTRACT

BRITISH INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS DURING THE ANGLO-IRISH WAR

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Elliott Nigel Reid

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This study examines the performance of the British authorities' intelligence operations against those of the Irish Republican Army during the years 1919-1921. It is a reassessment of previous perceptions on the British as well as an examination of the British administration and its policies that adversely affected the success of their campaign against Irish nationalists. Upon its conclusion, this study will show that British law enforcement and the military were in fact more successful in combating Irish nationalists than previously believed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On 6 December 1921, British and Irish representatives signed the Anglo-Irish Treaty, effectively ending the Anglo-Irish War, or, alternatively, the Irish War of Independence. Just as importantly, the treaty established of the Irish Free State, a self-governing dominion which would in time become the Republic of Ireland. Since the founding of an independent Ireland, scholars who have written about modern Irish history have almost unanimously come to the conclusion that the British, in terms of intelligence and information-gathering activities, were completely outmaneuvered by the Irish nationalists. In particular, much has been made of the Irish leader Michael Collins and the intelligence organization which he created and led throughout the conflict. Under Collins's leadership, many British intelligence agents and others who collected information on the Irish nationalist movement were either forced to resign their posts due to threats to their lives, or were killed while performing their duties. Perhaps the most recognized and well cited-example of the Irish intelligence community's success against its British adversaries is the killing of many agents connected with the Cairo Gang, a secret British intelligence group, on 21 November 1920. On that day, 14 members of the organization were caught unaware and shot by the "Squad," Michael Collins's personal I.R.A. unit tasked with countering British intelligence by eliminating spies and informers.

With notable successes such as this, Michael Collins and Irish intelligence as a whole have, for quite some time, been firmly recognized as being vastly superior to British intelligence

in the historical narrative.¹ However, with more in-depth research and closer scrutiny, it can be argued that British intelligence, conducted by both Irish law enforcement and the British military, was much more successful in dealing with Irish intelligence and Irish nationalism as a whole than previously realized. In fact, throughout the conflict, combined British intelligence efforts made great strides in countering the Irish Republican Army and its intelligence system, eliminating some of its best soldiers and agents, collecting information that was detrimental to the nationalist cause, and to an extent delaying the establishing of the Irish Free State. However, the British government lacked consistent overall policy in intelligence matters. Political considerations and disagreements exacerbated its inability to provide unified support for its intelligence community. Indeed, some government policies, such as the release of many imprisoned nationalists against the advice of those who had been tasked with their detection and capture, were positively detrimental to intelligence efforts. This thesis will show that British intelligence during the Anglo-Irish War deserves a much better reputation than it has been generally accorded by historians. Its operations and the successes that were achieved were remarkable in light of the hindrances and limitations with which it was burdened.

The aim of this thesis is not to minimize the achievements of Irish intelligence and Michael Collins during the struggle. It is, rather, to address the short shrift given British intelligence by historians who have focused too exclusively on the Irish side of events, and to bring more comprehensive attention to the British narrative.

¹Proponents of this view include contemporaries such as Hayden Talbot and Tom Barry, as well as historians like Tim Pat Coogan. Their views will be examined in fuller detail in Chapter Two.

The first of the following three chapters will examine the historiography of the intelligence war in Ireland and how it has gradually changed in recent decades. Utilizing primary sources written by participants of the war and acquaintances of Michael Collins, as well as biographies and works written after the event, it will be seen that through much of the previous century the British intelligence community has been overshadowed largely by the legend of Michael Collins, the unofficial director of Irish intelligence and later head of the Free State government. Even before his death in 1922, Collins has been seen as the mastermind behind Irish intelligence, and his personality and exploits have hampered a more in-depth analysis of intelligence operations as a whole. To a certain extent, the works of Irish intelligence officers working with or independently from Collins, as well as historians who have written about them, have done much the same thing. In the majority of these works the British and their intelligence activities are generally only mentioned in passing. Where more description of them is given, they are often depicted in a negative light. Only in recent decades have scholars started to show a more genuine interest in and a less critical view of these participants, yet as will be shown their evaluations are still in need of expansion.

The second chapter will provide an overview of the history of British intelligence, specifically from the time of the Napoleonic Wars. Supported primarily by secondary works, this chapter will show that it took the British administration nearly a century filled with trial and error to finally establish and maintain an intelligence community that would operate both within and outside of the empire. However much progress as was achieved in the creation of a more modern system in England and foreign nations, little of this progress was extended to British administration in Ireland. Racial and cultural biases, as well as the assumption that the police forces already established in Ireland were sufficient to gauge any subversive activity or

discontent, led the government to believe that a greater commitment to intelligence efforts on the island was unnecessary, and professionalism made the R.I.C.'s efforts seem amateurish.

The final chapter will address actual events of the intelligence war throughout the official years of the conflict, 1919-1921. Using a combination of primary sources that include memoirs and autobiographies from British and Irish Republican Army veterans as well as recorded witness statements from the latter, Cabinet documents, contemporary newspaper articles, and the personal papers of Richard Mulcahy, it will relate the measures taken by the British, the obstacles that had to be overcome, and the extent to which intelligence operations were successful. It will argue that such victories as were to be had were due to the high quality of British intelligence personnel, organization, and procedures.

CHAPTER II

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Although the Anglo-Irish War has been little researched in comparison to the many other conflicts that were waged around the world during the twentieth-century, certain aspects and subjects from the conflict have garnered considerably more attention than have others, not least of which was the information or intelligence war waged between republicans seeking an independent Ireland and the British administration. Without a doubt, scholars have argued almost unanimously that the Irish Republican Army outwitted and outmaneuvered the British and their unionist counterparts, who seemed to underestimate their opponents and failed to successfully defeat physical force republicans. Be that as it may, many historians vary in their assertions as to why this was so, how structured Irish intelligence really was, and who is to be credited with the campaign's success.

Additionally, while the wide body of scholarship generally promotes the view that the British were, militarily speaking and in terms of policing, completely overwhelmed and did not fully grasp the predicament in which they found themselves, a number of scholars have recently put forth new arguments that challenge this general perception, among them Peter Hart, Charles Townshend and W.H. Kautt. Examining the written records of those who participated or were associated with the conflict, one even finds instances of pessimism and doubt among Irish nationalists concerning their intelligence capabilities. Looking both at works written during the period by the combatants, as well as the scholarship of generations of historians, what has chiefly been examined are two aspects: Michael Collins himself and the ability of the Irish Republican

Army to conduct intelligence operations. These two aspects have, arguably, overshadowed a more in-depth analysis of British intelligence. Yet upon closer examination one finds glimpses of a more coherent British strategy that is just recently coming under more careful scrutiny.

To begin with, no analysis of the subject would be complete without examining the historiography of the “Big Fellow”, Michael Collins, the man appointed by the Volunteer executive to be Director of Intelligence and the first Commander-in-Chief of the Free State Army. Nor would one be able to view the subject without noting his subordinates. Though only one man, he has come to be seen as the most prominent figure of the revolution. To many both within academia and without, Michael Collins was the mastermind behind the IRA’s clandestine operations and successful assassinations. Even before his assassination at Béal na mBláth on 22 August 1922, Collins’ reputation and legendary character were being embellished by such journalists as the American Hayden Talbot, who began writing *Michael Collins’ Own Story*, supposedly with the help of the subject himself, in 1922, and finished the narrative shortly after the latter’s death.² With the additional help of interviews from a number of other national figures such as Eoin MacNeill, Talbot spread the name Collins to millions of readers in the United States who had until then not heard of the leader, or else did not know a great deal about him except what was published in the media about the Treaty negotiations. Some of Talbot’s claims in the biography remain unsubstantiated, as he claimed to have spoken with Collins face-to-face on numerous occasions over a course of nine months in the years 1921 and 1922, but other tales can be verified by cross-examination, such as Collins’ participation in the freeing of Piaras Béaslai and Austin Stack from Manchester Gaol. Embellished or not, Talbot’s work can

² Hayden Talbot, *Michael Collins’ Own Story* (London: Hutchison and Co., 1923), 13, Kindle.

be regarded as one of the first and most influential foundations of Collins' legacy. Talbot relates Collins' introduction into Irish nationalism from his father and elders, as well as his sense of identity while working as a civil servant in the heart of England.

In later chapters, readers are given a description of his narrow escapes from arrest and his creation of the Irish secret service to counter and overcome a seemingly much better organized intelligence branch. In one example, Michael Collins related to Talbot (supposedly) how he ingeniously evaded capture by a British raiding party while attending a meeting of the Irish Republican Army in the Mansion House. With a timely alert from friend and associate Joe O'Reilly, all members of the meeting, with the exception of Collins himself, escaped out the back of the building. Collins remained to collect the sensitive documents that would have otherwise seriously undermined the Irish cause if captured. Unable by this time to follow the escape route of his associates, he clambered up the chimney with the aid of a rope fashioned from bedsheets by O'Reilly on the roof above. There Collins waited for hours until certain the authorities finished their search of the residence. That same evening O'Reilly returned to the house under the guise of a fumigator and brought a British uniform for Collins to leave the premises undetected. Collins told Talbot that this, in a somewhat humorous manner, "was the only occasion on which I ever wore a British uniform, and the only time I ever resorted to even partial disguise. Probably no British uniform ever covered as coal-black a body!"³ Talbot's description is of a modest man who thinks only of the importance of his nation's freedom and right to self-determination. As can be seen from the passage above, Talbot also gives some mention of the British forces in his narrative, albeit a very marginal and pessimistic one. To Talbot, and those who read his work, the British were a brave but hapless group who could be

³ Ibid., Location 1240-71.

easily be tricked into letting their adversaries slip away as well as any information that could be useful to them. In regards to this, Talbot quoted Collins as saying that:

For the most part the personnel of this undeniably brave outfit commended my admiration. But, as I shall have occasion to point out more than once before I finish this tale, their bravery frequently outdistanced their judgment. My own experience leads me to hold that it is wiser for those who have the selecting of men for positions in which bravery and judgment are equal requirements to choose clever cowards rather than stupid heroes.⁴

With a slight nod to the British authorities, Collins surmised that those tasked with countering Irish nationalism were largely set up to fail from the beginning. The fault for this, according to Collins, lay with the British administration and the superior officers overseeing recruitment and training. Had they focused their attention more on the cunning and skillfulness of their personnel, the British may have been more formidable opponents. Still later in the narrative, Talbot again quoted Collins as saying that, referring to the Irish Volunteers weekly pamphlet *An t-Óglach*, “not once in three years was a single consignment of papers ever found by the British.”⁵ Both Collins’ heroic actions and British ineptitude proved to be prevalent themes when writing of Collins and the conflict in the coming decades.

Michael Collins’ Own Story was soon after followed by Piaras Béaslaí’s two-volume *Michael Collins and the Making of a New Ireland*. Béaslaí’s work is a significant source of information in that he had and maintained a close relationship with Collins during both the revolution and civil war, a fact which may have had a bearing on his very positive recollection of the Irish leader. As the historian Tom Garvin has written, not all of Collins’ contemporaries held him in such high esteem as Béaslaí, among them Austin Stack, a fellow nationalist and later

⁴ Ibid., Location 1213.

⁵ Ibid., Location 1317.

Minister of Home Affairs in 1921-1922. “Collins had trod on a lot of toes...” wrote Garvin. “Stack hated him, and Mick was notoriously contemptuous of Stack’s administrative abilities.”⁶ Another contemporary, Kevin O’Higgins, seemed to share similar feelings for both Collins and Éamon de Valera when he, according to Garvin, remarked: “That crooked Spanish bastard will get the better of that pasty-faced blasphemous fucker from Cork.”⁷ That Béaslaí and Collins maintained a close working relationship and did not disagree on matters of any significant importance as did others may have had, at least in part, something to do with his high praise of Collins and his extremely positive work on him. A member of the Dáil and a veteran of the Easter Rising, Béaslaí left government office in 1923 and began writing his definitive work, which was completed in 1926.⁸ In much the same way as Talbot, Béaslaí portrayed Collins as a very quick-witted figure who could easily evade capture and do as he pleased without garnering the slightest attention from authorities. While serving time in prison, Béaslaí recalled that Collins would often send the former letters enquiring as to his health and relaying current events. Remarkably, this was done with Collins giving his real residential address on the postcards as well as his real name!⁹ Again, Béaslaí presents to his audience the vision that the Crown authorities were inept in their duties, although at times his narrative contradicts itself on this point. Earlier in the same chapter, Béaslaí states that the authorities, particularly the R.I.C. and

⁶ Gabriel Doherty and Dermot Keogh (eds.), *Michael Collins and the Making of the Irish State*. 3rd ed. (Cork: Mercier Press, 2006), 152.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 152-3.

⁸ Piarás Béaslaí, *Michael Collins and the Making of a New Ireland* (Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint, 1983), ix-xvi.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 336.

the D.M.P., were organizations both feared and commended for their excellent knowledge of people and events. “In every town or village all the movements of persons were watched and reported upon. All popular organisations were kept under observation, and all persons who expressed patriotic opinions were the object of surveillance. Even their activities in such matters as teaching Irish, or acting in Irish plays, were duly reported; and Dublin Castle, as the result of these reports, had the most exact information as to the personnel, strength and methods of all nationalist movements in the country.”¹⁰ Were the Crown authorities an efficient and highly knowledgeable group or not? After this passage Béaslaí was silent on the matter, except to expand upon how easily Collins and the IRA made easy work of destroying British intelligence and counterintelligence efforts, especially in the capital. “In fact Collins”, wrote Béaslaí, “after one year’s work, had effectively paralysed the British Government’s spy system in Dublin, a system which had worked so effectively for so many years, and defeated all efforts of Irish Separatists in the past.”¹¹ It seemed, at least from the point of view of Béaslaí, that the Crown authorities were only efficient in their duties prior to the conflict. After it had begun, Collins seemingly destroyed their capabilities within one year of initiating a campaign against them. More analysis of the police forces’ and military’s intelligence work, as will be seen, would wait until years later to really be explored.

Those who had met Michael Collins only a handful of times or who had merely heard stories of him as they carried out independent operations of their own elsewhere across the country further spread his legacy when they published personal accounts of their wartime

¹⁰Ibid., 320.

¹¹Ibid., 379.

service. Charles Dalton was one of these individuals. Dalton, according to his own account, was from an early age a strong advocate of and sympathizer with the independence movement, having lived in a neighborhood of Dublin that was in close proximity to the fighting in 1916 and listening to his family's and others' condemnation of those who would rebel against the government.¹² He joined the Volunteers the following year and during the conflict became a prominent member of the Squad, Collins' personal intelligence and assassination organization formed in 1919, and eventually a senior officer in the Free State Army. Dalton's memoirs contain a wealth of information concerning the many operations he and his fellow Volunteers were engaged in as well as their feelings regarding their actions and the opposing forces.

His memoirs are also a testament to how charming Collins was and continued to be to his subordinates who barely even knew him on a personal level. When making plans for commandeering a British military vehicle in 1920, Dalton, who by this time was a trusted agent in the upper echelon of the intelligence branch, recounted how when plans were being made for the operation: "I listened with the keenest interest to this recital, observing with the greatest admiration the way in which Michael Collins considered every detail, explored every aspect of the job and overlooked no possible flaw."¹³ Irish intelligence was then, according to Dalton, a well-oiled machine that, under the leadership of Collins, had no great trouble in executing its missions and responsibilities. On the subject of the British authorities themselves, Dalton neglected to give any real detailed account of their intelligence methods or those employed in intelligence networks, though he did give slightly more credit to the Crown authorities in general

¹² Charles Dalton. *With the Dublin Brigade: Espionage and Assassination with Michael Collins' Intelligence Unit* (Mercier Press, 2014), 419-65, Kindle.

¹³ Ibid. Location 1662.

than did either Talbot or Béaslaí. Though not praising their methods or victories in any way, Dalton did concede that as the conflict continued the British were making progress in their campaign, and the nationalists had to step up the campaign of their own to not lose all for which they had fought so hard. “It was necessary for us, therefore, to be prepared for the new offensive and to intensify our campaign also.”¹⁴ Meanwhile, according to Dalton’s contemporaries, British intelligence was poor and lacked coordination.

Collins’ reputation was not only the product of journalists trying to sell a tantalizing story, or close acquaintances who wished to preserve their perceived vision of a man with whom they fought for a common cause and shared personal connections. Those, such as Charles Dalton, who had grown up with stories of Collins, included their own perceptions of him in their recollections, which further built up his legendary status in Irish history. Since the publication of both Talbot’s and Beaslai’s biographies, numerous historians have produced material on Collins that have changed little in scope or depiction. Outside of print, Michael Collins has been portrayed in film, most notably in Neil Jordan’s 1996 biopic starring Liam Neeson. Despite the use of previously unsearched and unavailable material that mark the differences in the way they are written, Collins’ narrative and character have remained fairly static, although it can be found that individuals past and present have expressed somewhat different views of the man and his role in the intelligence war. Coogan’s biography is perhaps the best example of this. His work does not refute the greatness of Collins nor does it necessarily contradict the biographies of his predecessors. What is different is that his biography adds depth to Michael Collins’ persona that had before remained absent. With the usual political narrative present, Coogan includes tales of

¹⁴ Ibid., Location 992.

love and romance that may have existed between Collins and the women with whom he was in frequent contact over his lifetime. In particular, Coogan includes correspondence between Collins and Kitty Kiernan, his girlfriend and eventual fiancée.¹⁵ The two kept in regular contact during the revolution and reportedly planned to be married before Collins' death. Even more controversial is Coogan's evidence that the two engaged in sexual relations outside of marriage.¹⁶ For this bit of information, Canadian historian Peter Hart surmised that since the first narratives to appear, Collins' character "has gone from a virginal disregard for women to a 007esque seizing of sexual opportunities."¹⁷ Coogan also wrote that as the conflict intensified and the nationalists were facing ever-growing danger, "Collins made a point of giving up smoking and drinking,"¹⁸ for which he had the propensity earlier in life. Unfortunately, Coogan did not go into further detail as to what kind of danger or pressure the leader was facing when he finally decided to give up these vices.

Like his predecessors, Coogan was ambiguous as far as the police and military are concerned. He does indeed mention them, but only very broadly and in a way that does not differ dramatically from previous historians. For instance, Coogan makes reference to the Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries at one point, stating that they "made of the country a most inappropriate hell for the entire population", but offers no real description of what their exact

¹⁵ Tim Pat Coogan, *Michael Collins: A Biography* (1st Palgrave ed. New York: Palgrave, 2002), vii, 20-1.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 80-3.

¹⁷ Peter Hart, *Mick: The Real Michael Collins* (1st American ed. New York: Viking, 2006), xix.

¹⁸ Coogan, *Collins*, 95.

purpose in Ireland really was nor the contributions they made to the British fighting effort, instead focusing solely on their violent behavior and brutality. In regards to British secret service networks, he only briefly mentions that along with these ex-British recruits, “there were the hidden dangers of the British Secret Service and its attendant squads of assassins.”¹⁹ Again, Coogan touched lightly on the topic, but went no further other than to equate the British as a whole with little more than murderers and thugs. What Coogan did do was include in his biography elements of his subject’s life that in the decades before would not have been seen in a positive light due to contemporary social and moral norms. Aside from these revelations, given the wealth of material that can easily be found on Michael Collins within just a few decades after his death alone, Coogan’s comment that “the fact is Collins was nearly airbrushed out of history until my biography appeared nearly seven years ago”²⁰ seems highly absurd.

Although the image of Michael Collins that has manifested itself through the works of these writers and others has dominated much of the public consciousness, there have been some who are more critical of this view in one way or another, both during Collins’ life and after. One historian who has presented Michael Collins in a less than ideal light is John M. Regan. This is especially apparent in his article “Michael Collins, General Commanding-in-Chief as a Historiographical problem.”²¹ In it, Regan questions Collins’ leadership of the Provisional Government upon the outbreak of civil war in 1922. With the assassination of Sir Henry Wilson, as well as anti-treatyite plans to engage in a military campaign in the north following partition,

¹⁹ Ibid, Location 2805-2830.

²⁰ Doherty and Keogh, *Michael Collins*, 211.

²¹ Ibid., 95.

Arthur Griffith and Collins faced pressure from the British government to take control of the volatile situation and the Four Courts I.R.A. These and other events led Collins to act outside of the authority of the Free State government and continue, it seems, some of his earlier espionage activities, which for a time led to the creation of a military state and his acting above the law. Thus, Collins' leadership of his intelligence organization was, during this time, geared more towards keeping his own policies intact rather than those of the state, and his intelligence organization was more loyal to him than to the government. Further, Regan argues that the image of Collins as representing and protecting democratic principles should be questioned, considering his fight against Eamón De Valera and his supporters, who continued to press for the long sought-after republic.

Arguably the most controversial work to be published on Collins, and one which deviates significantly from the narratives that have come before, is Peter Hart's *Mick: The Real Michael Collins*. Already well-known in the academic community for his 1998 work *The I.R.A and Its Enemies: Violence and Community in Cork, 1916-1923*, which continues to be scrutinized for its inclusion of anonymous sources, Hart published *Mick: The Real Michael Collins* in 2005. In it, Hart depicts a leader who gained his reputation and legendary status through opportunity and being "in the right place at the right time"²² more than anything else. Using only sources available in the public domain, Hart depicts Collins as one of many who could have led a military campaign against the British. In one passage, Hart states that the revolution "produced hundreds of Michael Collins's."²³ He did not deny that Collins exuded certain attributes that made him an able leader, as he gave him credit for establishing reliable and resourceful networks

²² Hart, *Mick*, 122.

²³ *Ibid.*, 413.

that carried “messages between Dublin and the great beyond,” but he found it inaccurate to give absolute credit to any one individual. Instead, he puts greater emphasis on those who relayed information to Collins at great risks to their own lives, citing among them Ned Broy and David Neligan, both of whom operated in Dublin Castle and were never compromised.

Further Hart argued that Collins was not a great judge of those with whom he associated. To support this, Hart cites the initial trust that Collins had for a man who would later prove to be an agent for the British. Early in the conflict, a Mr. Byrnes (real name Jameson) infiltrated the republican movement in England through the help of Basil Thomson and Scotland Yard. Over the coming months Byrnes worked his way into the upper echelon of the Dublin IRA and eventually gained an audience with Collins himself. It was only after several meetings that his cover began to unravel and he was ultimately shot. In the wake of this, Hart argued that Collins attempted to deflect the blame of this debacle from himself on to his subordinates, stating that they should have caught this breach in security earlier.²⁴ These arguments made by Hart are significant in that they truly break with the traditional rhetoric about Collins. He was not some type of superhuman that could read an individual’s intentions nor plan all of his operations perfectly as, those such as Dalton seemed certain he could. Perhaps more significantly, Hart, in his short introduction to *British Intelligence in Ireland: The Final Reports*, argues that British intelligence was more efficient than has been acknowledged in earlier histories. “It was not all that hard to identify and arrest most rebels before mid-1920...,” wrote Hart. “Even as late as the winter of 1920, once given permission to act, the army’s novice intelligence officers found many guerillas there for the taking, and rapidly decimated key IRA units.”²⁵

²⁴ Hart, *Mick*, 224-36.

Peter Hart's analysis is perhaps more critical than other historians, but he is certainly not alone in thinking that Collins is often given too much credit for the conduct of the intelligence war. In his essay, "Collins and Intelligence, 1919-1923: From Brotherhood to Bureaucracy," Eunan O'Halpin argues that it would be wrong to assume that one man who played so many important roles in the conflict could have overseen every aspect of intelligence and espionage. Collins attempted to set up a cohesive system where all vital information would be forwarded to central command and disseminated, yet in reality his complete control, if he did indeed have complete control, extended only across the capital. As is often stated now, the conflict and the violence that manifested itself was not distributed equally across Ireland. Rather, fighting was sporadic and some counties, namely Cork, saw more activity than others. Information did make its way to Collins and his subordinates, but its quantity and quality rested upon individual brigades and their commandants. Efforts were made by headquarters to improve communications, but in the end no solid network came into being.

O'Halpin further argues that the efficiency of Collins' intelligence organization can be troublesome to gauge depending on how broadly one uses the term "intelligence" in its military capacity. The procurement of arms and the carrying out of assassinations, O'Halpin has argued, generally falls under the broad term of intelligence, but in fact is a separate category. Really, "only military intelligence and counter-intelligence should be termed intelligence functions. Arms procurement was a separate operation involving purchasing and smuggling networks abroad and in Irish ports, while the difference between intelligence proper and assassination was marked at an organisational level in 1919 with the creation of the 'Squad' as a unit of gunmen

²⁵ Peter Hart (ed.), *British Intelligence in Ireland, 1920-21: The Final Reports* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), 10.

independent of the IRA headquarters' intelligence organisation but under Collins' direct control." If only military intelligence and counter-intelligence are taken into consideration, then it was the latter in which Collins was most adept.²⁶

Finally, it is appropriate to examine the scholarship on the Crown intelligence forces during the period in question. Following its conclusion, the historiography of the war has focused heavily on the Irish participants, in particular Michael Collins. What little attention has been paid to the British largely examines atrocities committed by crown forces and the inadequacy of those forces to establish and maintain a unit that could match or eliminate the opposing forces. All too often a serious study of British activities has been eclipsed by the heroics and bravery of Collins and his subordinates, as well as the victories they attained in the conflict. To a lesser extent, studies of the British have also been marred by talk of the Crown authorities' inability to detect and/or apprehend their adversaries or make their campaign effective. To a certain extent these charges are accurate and a historian would be hard-pressed to refute many of these assumptions. Especially during the initial phase of the war the British government and the Irish administration were slow to react to the guerilla activities that gradually grew in their intensity after the Soloheadbeg ambush that claimed the lives of two R.I.C. constables. Local law enforcement agencies were tasked with quelling the unrest with little support from the armed forces and inadequate funding. It was not until the end of 1919 that ex-servicemen were recruited in Britain to augment the dwindling and constantly harassed police, and even then this did little good in the long run. These ex-servicemen, or Black and Tans, as they were so dubbed during and after the conflict, did much more harm to British efforts than good, both in the conflict and, for quite some time, its historiography. Even after further

²⁶Doherty and Keogh, *Michael Collins*, 72.

assistance like this was given, the I.R.A. continued to strike significant blows against crown authorities. Yet this is only one part of the narrative, one which has been dominated by bias and the victory of republican forces. Seeing the events in Ireland as a matter not of war, but of criminality, the British left matters in the hands of local law enforcement, but as the troubles continued, the army was given greater role and in time improved its cooperation with the RIC and the Dublin Metropolitan Police. Combined intelligence began to function more adequately in the latter phase of the war, and the IRA felt increasing pressure through growing document seizures, raids and human intelligence collected from informants.

Very rarely during the decades after the conflict has the R.I.C., D.M.P. or the military really been given much attention. What comments that have been afforded them are generally ambivalent in nature, stating, often at the same time, that the police were both a functioning system at the time the conflict arose, and one that could not capture an IRA man if he were right next to a law enforcement officer. However, there is no lack of opinion in these memoirs and biographies when it comes to the subject of the Black and Tans and Auxiliaries, those recruits who traveled from England to assist the official police. One I.R.A. veteran, Tom Barry, reflected in his autobiography *Guerilla Days in Ireland* what he thought of these groups: “Of all the ruthless forces that occupied Ireland through the centuries, those Auxiliaries were surely the worst.” “They were openly established as a terrorist body, with the avowed object of breaking by armed force, Ireland’s continued resistance to British rule.”²⁷ The historian William Henry concurred with Barry, and further argued that their presence and actions had only a negative

²⁷ Tom Barry, *Guerilla Days in Ireland* (Anvil Books, 1962), 38.

effect on the British campaign. “Most were mere thugs and some were killers. Their actions managed to unite the Irish population like never before done in defiance of British rule.”²⁸

This was the general view held by participants of the conflict and, to varying degrees, a view still expressed at present. It was not until D.M. Leeson wrote his *Black and Tans: British Police and Auxiliaries in the Irish War of Independence* that these groups were really given a much less biased and more thorough analysis. Contrary to long held perception, Leeson argued in his work that the Black and Tans were not really thugs and low-lives, but in reality were demobilized soldiers looking for work in the years after the First World War, and they were prodded by the violence they found themselves in to commit overt acts of violence and aggressive behavior: “According to legend, the Black and Tans were ex-convicts and psychopaths, hardened by prison and crazed by war. In fact, most of them were quite ordinary men, whose violent and even criminal behaviour was a product of circumstance rather than character.”²⁹ In his view, Leeson argues that while the main duty of these men was to provide the regular police with extra backup to patrol the counties and bring the country back under law and order, they did make some contributions to the British intelligence effort, namely through raids on houses of suspected nationalists and those thought to have sympathy for their cause. To argue this point, Leeson cites a successful raid by the Auxiliaries in 1920 during which they captured Peadar Clancy, commandant of the Dublin Brigade. That same night they also managed to capture William Pikington, commandant of the Sligo Brigade, in a separate raid on

²⁸ William Henry, *Blood for Blood: The Black and Tan War in Galway* (Mercier Press, 2012), 556, Kindle.

²⁹ D.M. Leeson, *The Black and Tans: British Police and Auxiliaries in the Irish War of Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 28, Kindle.

Vaughn's Hotel.³⁰ However, these recruits often did more harm than good, negatively affecting the British intelligence war. They often acted without official orders or even proper information, resulting in the maiming and killing of many civilians. This, understandably, only angered the population and made them more reluctant to associate themselves with police officers, thus ridding the British of another means to gain information through personal interactions. This was the first work to really put forth from the British point of view an explanation and extensive focus on a group that fought the Irish republicans.

One of the first to really make a concentrated effort to look into the situation from the British point of view as a whole was Charles Townshend in his 1975 work *The British Campaign in Ireland, 1919-1921: The Development of Political and Military Policies*. Undoubtedly the most important aspect of this work is Townshend's look at London's administration and the role it played in shaping the course of the war. Drawing from a combination of personal papers and Cabinet records, Townshend placed most of the blame concerning the failed campaign on political intervention and the indecisiveness of leaders to agree on a unified policy that would eliminate infighting and miscommunication, and put all of those involved on a sound footing. Further complicating matters was the constant fighting and distrust between the civil authorities and the military. Even without the exacerbation of political interference, individuals within the police forces and army refused to cooperate with one another due to each side's conflicting conceptions of the other's specific duties and functions, and how each, respectively, could best accomplish its tasks of information gathering and overall intelligence operations. In these confrontations, the army was by far the more critical factor. As Townshend stated, the "main

³⁰ Ibid., Location 555.

military objection to the police intelligence system had always been its reliance on personal knowledge and intuition rather than formal organization.”³¹ Though the police did indeed record their findings in logbooks and transmit them to other police barracks, they did not follow as bureaucratic or hierarchical a system as those serving in the military were accustomed to or expected. As will be examined and expanded upon further in the third chapter, the police forces, both the R.I.C. and D.M.P., were by long experience predisposed to collect information on an individual basis and later record that information in their own manner for future use. This contradicted the military method of collecting intelligence on a much more impersonal basis and quickly copying it for inspection for senior officers and the army bureaucracy as a whole. It seems then that a large part of the problem was not that there was a specific lack of intelligence, but rather disregard and contempt amongst parties as to how information was being collected and disseminated. In addition to this, Townshend’s book was one of the first to really acknowledge a proficiency in British intelligence gathering, especially during the second phase of the war. In the immediate aftermath of Bloody Sunday, “500 arrests were made” and the interrogation of these prisoners, as well as the documents seized during the searches, did much to elevate the position of the British.³² Of course, recourse to a broad net also suggests that British intelligence lacked sufficient information to concentrate on the most dangerous nationalist opposition. Mass arrests were very likely to result in some important catches, but not all of the 500 arrested were engaged in nationalist activities. Still, the British were once again starting to identify who were involved, and were taking extra precautions in an effort to prevent any more of the I.R.A.

³¹ Charles Townshend, *The British Campaign in Ireland, 1919-1921: The Development of Political and Military Policies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 126.

³² *Ibid.*, 130.

slipping through their fingers, dispatching extra motorized patrols across the island and placing agents on board trains to prohibit enemy movements.³³

Keith Jeffrey provided further analysis of British intelligence and the advances it made during the conflict, and at the same time provided a more thoughtful analysis of the Anglo-Irish War as a whole, in his 1987 case-study entitled “British Military Intelligence Following World War One.” Jeffrey acknowledged the challenges faced by the British in conducting their campaign, among them the lack of centralization, yet he argued that British intelligence was far from ineffective. Intelligence units working on an individual basis increasingly improved over the course of the conflict, and Jeffrey cited Ormonde Winter and those under his command as a case in point. Under Winter, who had had no previous experience or training in intelligence matters, law enforcement personnel seized thousands of documents and other sensitive information, which allowed them to arrest hundreds of I.R.A. members and infiltrate the nationalist newspaper, the *Irish Bulletin*, where the British inserted false information to demoralize their opponents and attack Sinn Féin.³⁴ Jeffrey’s work is perhaps most significant in that it shows the progress made by British intelligence in the face of many obstacles such as the lack of a unified organization, implementing new and successful methods to counter the I.R.A. while in the midst of the fighting. This has greatly contributed to the historiography of the Anglo-Irish War. However, one of the work’s greatest drawbacks is the lack of detail regarding British operations as well as evidence to better support his argument.

³³ Ibid., 92-5.

³⁴ K.G. Robertson (ed.), *British and American Approaches to Intelligence* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 71-3.

Paul McMahon's work *British Spies and Irish Rebels: British Intelligence and Ireland, 1916-1945*, published in 2008, should also be included here, as he too made an effort at examining British intelligence in Ireland during the twentieth century, although his work unfortunately only touches upon the Anglo-Irish War. Indeed, McMahon's book provides an overview of the British intelligence situation between the years 1916 and 1921, but it does not provide any real analysis of the period. Rather, McMahon used the subject of the conflict as a jumping off point for an examination of British intelligence operations during the Second World War and the conflict in Northern Ireland.³⁵ A later and much more significant work of note is J.B.E. Hittle's *Michael Collins and the Anglo-Irish War: Britain's Counterinsurgency Failure*. Still critical of British intelligence and the methods employed, Hittle does stress the need for a more extensive analysis of memoirs and personal papers to grasp a better understanding of British operations at the ground level.³⁶ His work argues that the British intelligence struck many blows against the I.R.A., especially under Ormonde Winter in the later months of the conflict: "Winter enjoyed an often unheralded string of successes in the eight months from October 1920 to July 1921." Among these successes Hittle cited the unmasking of Irish spy James McNamara; the raid on Richard Mulcahy's house and the capture of I.R.A. codes and dispatches in his possession; and the arrest and interrogation of Vincent Fourvargue, who gave up the names of every member of a Dublin Brigade to the police.³⁷ Still, Hittle falls short himself in utilizing these types of sources to bolster this statement and looks upon the subject "as a case

³⁵ Paul McMahon, *British Spies and Irish Rebels: British Intelligence and Ireland, 1916-1945* (Woodbridge, UK; Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2011), 3-4.

³⁶ J.B.E. Hittle, *Michael Collins and the Anglo-Irish War: Britain's Counterinsurgency Failure* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books Inc., 2011), 219.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 202.

study of intelligence management under conditions of low-intensity conflict.”³⁸ Furthermore, the author shows considerable bias against scholars as he names the lack of real-world experience in the field of intelligence as a hindrance to analysis.

In light of this, it is Peter Hart once again who has made the most profound breakthrough in Anglo-Irish War history. Prior to his death in 2010, Hart edited a reprint of *British Intelligence in Ireland, 1920-21: The Final Reports*, containing the official documents *A Record of the Rebellion in Ireland in 1920-21, and the Part Played by the Army in Dealing with It (Intelligence)*, and Ormonde Winter’s *A Report on the Intelligence Branch of the Chief of Police, Dublin Castle from May 1920 to July 1921*. (Winter held the position of Chief of Police Forces in Ireland, and under his leadership those forces were reorganized, and coordination and cooperation between the various law enforcement groups were improved.) Released only recently, these two documents provide a wealth of insight into British operations by themselves, but Hart further expanded upon their significance with additional research of his own, including secondary sources such as Charles Townshend’s *The British Campaign in Ireland* and papers from the Imperial War Museum.

Hart argued that Michael Collins and his subordinates did not always have the upper hand during the war. Rather, “the intelligence war was a see-saw struggle with both sides landing effective blows and enjoying periods of success alternating with bouts of failure.”³⁹ As has been noted several times by researchers, the bulk of official documentation, with the exception of those such as the papers mentioned above, was burned or otherwise erased from the historical

³⁸ Ibid., xiii.

³⁹ Hart, *Intelligence*, 14.

record soon after the Dublin Castle administration ceased to operate and British forces were withdrawn from the country, resulting in many individuals coming to the conclusion that an in-depth analysis of the role played by the British is all but impossible.⁴⁰ Hart, however, in his introduction to the primary sources, effectively dismisses this pessimistic view. Historians today now have at their disposal “newly available documents from the Irish administration, the Irish Command and the Cabinet and War Offices.” In addition, many more primary documents have “been de-classified in the Public Record Office in London or decanted into museum collections among the personal papers of departed generals.”⁴¹

Other scholars, such as W.H. Kautt in his work *Ground Truths: British Army Operations in the Irish War of Independence*, have also dispelled this view, casting light on the British official documents that are still in existence and expanding upon them with such evidence as the statements given by IRA veterans after the conflict to the government and now publicly available through the Bureau of Military History. In particular, Kautt’s work re-examines, much like Peter Hart, the four volumes of *The Record of the Rebellion in Ireland* published by the British Army’s Irish Command in 1922. Focusing on the first drafts of the reports, Kautt included annotations that at times contradict the views and facts that are given in the original text, such as the strength of republican forces and the tactics used to counter them. Additionally, Kautt’s annotations provide more specific details to augment the general references in the text, thereby aiding historians in further research. To cite one example, *The Record of the Rebellion in Ireland* makes passing reference to the reorganization of intelligence and how it “gave excellent results

⁴⁰ Hittle, *Counterinsurgency Failure*, 216.

⁴¹ Hart, *Intelligence*, 14-6.

which were soon evident,” without stating how or by whom it was reorganized. Kautt’s annotations make up for this with a description of Ormonde Winter, his establishment of a “Raid Bureau” and that bureau’s mission to analyze captured documents. In Kautt’s view, the British command misinterpreted aspects of the conflict in its reports, and this was due to its limited perspective. The British command’s narrow focus, concentrated as it was on the reports it received periodically, often left it without a broader context to aid interpretation. Superiors were sometimes left with a sterile, academic assessment, depriving them of ground-level perspective. As Kautt wrote, “in a war largely over perception, what people *believed* happened was frequently more important than the kinetic truth.”⁴² Therefore, Kautt’s work offers a better comparison between reports of what was happening on a daily basis and what superior officers perceived in a more bureaucratic context.

Finally, when the topic of assassinations are mentioned or explored, the image of Michael Collins’ famous “Squad” is nearly always conjured, as when, most famously, members of the unit killed 14 British agents supposedly connected to the Cairo Gang on November 21, 1920. Just as Michael Collins has overshadowed most other events during the war, the Squad too has overshadowed the activities of British intelligence officers working in the streets of Dublin and the counties. Collins’ clandestine unit had many successes, but they did not always identify the right target, nor did they uncover or expose all British intelligence officers. Further, it is difficult to gauge the performance of British intelligence services from the viewpoint of official documents, but when one sets aside the political and bureaucratic conflicts and in-fighting, focusing instead on individual and local circumstances, one sees that many of those who undertook intelligence work met with relative success. Hart argues that despite the little

⁴² Kautt, *Ground Truths*, 16.

assistance given from headquarters and the lack of cooperation between the separate groups, the police forces and army made great strides while acting on their own initiative. Immediately after the events of Bloody Sunday, intelligence officers within the army and police had by then “identified most of their opponents” and “Informers sprang up once again and arms were found in unprecedented numbers.” They gained crucial information and even access to nationalist organizations, and, in contrast to the standard narrative, most of these men “had at least one informer within guerilla ranks.”⁴³

Peter Hart also tested the argument in his introduction that the RIC and DMP, when once again examined at the ground level, were not quite as inadequate in their dealings with rebel forces as is so often stated. Due to their being natives of Ireland and knowledgeable of local culture and sentiments, constables had little trouble in apprehending rebels and important commanders early in the war. The problem lay in keeping those arrested in prison. Hart argued that a “failing judicial system and repeated, politically motivated releases of prisoners in 1916, 1917, 1919 and 1920 were the problems here, not a lack of basic information.”⁴⁴ Unfortunately, Hart passed away before he could expand upon these arguments, but his short introduction is significant because it has laid the groundwork for further research and analysis.

In conclusion, it cannot be overstated that Michael Collins has been and continues to be the main focus of attention in terms of the research and historiography of the Anglo-Irish War. Before he was even laid to rest, the mythology and idolization of Collins was being formed by such individuals as Hayden Talbot. In the years after his publication, numerous other

⁴³ Ibid., 12-13.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 10.

contemporaries picked up the pen and created for the public an almost larger than life figure that cast off the yoke of centuries of British exploitation and imperialism. Following them, researchers in later decades have continued to write about Michael Collins and his persona, with very little variation in their narratives. In recent years, the legendary Michael Collins has even been presented in a major motion picture. While there have been some critics who deny that he was a gifted individual who did more for the nationalist war effort than any other of his time, Collins and those who have written of him hinder further exploration of other subjects in the conflict, whether they be political, social, or cultural. So too has Collins' Squad slowed the progression of twentieth-century Irish history.

Attempts have been made to better explore the British side of the conflict, such as J.B.E Hittle's *Michael Collins and the Anglo-Irish War*, but they have fallen short in their analysis of British intelligence operations. It is perhaps Peter Hart and W.H. Kautt who have made the greatest contributions to the British perspective in Ireland. With only a handful of introductory pages, Hart has laid the groundwork for more in-depth research, citing newly-released seldom-used sources to do so. Kautt has followed his example to a certain degree, adding new commentary and perspectives on the documents written by Army GHQ after the conflict had ended, questioning what it believed to be true and comparing its perspectives with information from the ground level. Still, much work needs to be done, and Peter Hart's brief statements as well as Kautt's contributions must be built upon. What is needed, and what will be presented later in this thesis, is a closer examination of the individuals who participated in the conflict and their experiences. The British government and the leadership on both sides have been used to analyze the subject in question, but very little attention has been given to the individuals who participated in the day-to-day intelligence work and their interpretations of how the course of the

conflict was going. Thus, this thesis will take into account the views of the leadership on both sides as well as those of ordinary participants to present a clearer view of the intelligence war during the period.

CHAPTER III

BACKGROUND

On 12 July, 1909, a sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence met for the final time after five months of regular sessions. The primary purpose of the sub-committee was to decide whether or not new policies needed to be put into effect in regards to the threat of foreign spies and subversives within the United Kingdom, and what services were needed to carry out those policies. Overseen by Secretary of State for War Richard Burdon Haldane, the committee included such high-profile figures as Reginald McKenna, First Lord of the Admiralty, Home Secretary Herbert Gladstone; Admiral Alexander Bethell; and representatives of the Treasury and Foreign Offices. In addition to addressing the issue of risks to national security due to foreign espionage, a second task was to determine if changes were necessary in the present system of collecting information from abroad. At that final meeting in July, the members of the committee agreed that a new organization should and would be established to take over the duty of intelligence gathering and counter-intelligence, both within and outside of the Empire.¹

This organization was initially known as the Secret Service Bureau, which would eventually evolve into MI5 and MI6. The creation of such an organization had been a long and tedious process. There were three fundamental questions that needed to be addressed to create the modern service. First, what kind of information would and should be sought? Second, where and by what means would this information be obtained and disseminated? Finally, how

¹ Keith Jeffery, *The Secret History of MI6* (New York: Penguin Press, 2010), 302-41, Kindle.

would an effective and efficient intelligence organization be structured? By the beginning of the twentieth century, due both to military trends on the continent and the growing fear and paranoia at home, the British administration had finally been compelled to answer these questions and to make a firm decision to move forward. That decision could not have come at a more vital time, for the gathering of intelligence would be of the utmost importance as Great Britain entered into the First World War and, shortly thereafter, the Anglo-Irish War. Intelligence departments had finally become a permanent fixture within the military by the early twentieth century, and the methods and conduct of information gathering became more clearly defined since the previous century. Now there were permanent staffs within the army and navy that reported directly to their superiors who, in turn, conveyed intelligence they deemed critical to the War Office and other members of government.

Field offices were established in foreign countries and British agents carefully studied troop movements and public sentiment in areas in which they were posted. Similarly, the police forces in England became proficient in their work of identifying and apprehending radical extremists, starting with the suppression of the Fenian movement in the mid-nineteenth century and later German spies. However, as much as military intelligence, as well as police intelligence in England, was restructured and refined during this period, the structure of the Irish police forces remained nearly unaltered. Due to fears of public resentment, as well as cultural bias, intelligence gathering in Ireland was largely left to that which could be gleaned from daily interactions and local knowledge, a system which would be the primary method in dealing with Sinn Féin and the Irish Republican Army and one that would lead to conflict between the Irish intelligence gathering services and the government. As intelligence services in England became more professionalized and increasingly focused their attention and efforts on foreign nations

such as Germany, they became accustomed to their own modes of operations and intelligence gathering and expected other services within the empire to follow the new system. Yet Ireland had been left out of the professionalization of intelligence, and the Irish police forces only became better organized later. All of these would prove to be significant factors in the effectiveness of intelligence organizations during the Anglo-Irish War.

A prototype for the Secret Service Bureau can be discerned as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, when just prior to Great Britain's declaration of war against France in the Napoleonic Wars, the nation took tentative steps toward creating an intelligence service tasked with gathering information on other nations' strengths, tactics, ordnance and movements. In March 1803 General Brownrigg suggested to Frederick, Duke of York, that a "Depot of Military Knowledge" should be established. The tasks assigned to the Depot were consistent collection of information forwarded by overseas nationals, study of operations and troop movements, and collection and maintenance of topographical maps in areas that would be of use to the military.² Faced by the Napoleonic threat, the British realized that they knew very little about Napoleon's strategy or the strength of his armies on the continent. Although the creation of the department was workable in concept, actual operations were severely limited by two factors. One of these was the Depot's ongoing difficulty in operational staffing. The constant need for active troops drained the availability of officers, and those who did join the service were often prone to leave after a relatively short time, seeking greater opportunities for promotion and recognition in the active service. The second problem was the time and effort required for mapmaking and topographical surveys. Due in part to the inadequate and often inaccurate cartographic and

² Jock Haswell, *The First Respectable Spy: The Life and Times of Colquhoun Grant, Wellington's Head of Intelligence* (London: Hamilton, 1969), 72-3.

topological data of the era, these areas demanded an inordinate commitment of time and effort, and little was left for studying the enemy's troop movements, ordnance, and the like.³ The priority placed on mapmaking may be understood considering the deficient state of cartography in many parts of the continent. As an example, in 1808 the Kingdom of Spain, which had come under the effective control of Napoleon, had yet to map its nation with modern cartographic techniques. What maps that had been drawn were small in scale and were riddled with errors in distances. Portugal had begun mapping its terrain, yet most of these documents had been taken with the fleeing royal family and had not been available to the British government. In an effort to ameliorate the operational difficulties, General Brownrigg increased the headquarters' staff to ten officers and eight civilian clerks soon after his appointment as Quartermaster General in 1803, and attached certain officers from the department to the British armies.

The person tasked with heading the Depot when Britain began its campaign in the Peninsular War was Sir George Murray. His main duties were to survey Spain and Portugal's topography and produce maps sufficient to give the allied armies easy and quick routes to their objectives, as well as mark suitable land for making camp. To do so, Murray created a Corps of Guides composed largely of Portuguese and Spanish nationals who rode ahead of the troops and marked the designated routes with colored flags. The army's Corps of Engineers themselves made some progress in mapping the area but, as would be the case in Ireland over a century later, the best individuals tasked for such a job were those born and raised in the specific areas being surveyed. British soldiers could and did become familiar with the details of the land and peoples

³ Thomas G. Fergusson, *British Military Intelligence, 1870-1914: The Development of a Modern Intelligence Organization* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1984), 18-19.

with which they were in contact, but this proved to be a slow and cumbersome process for which the military did not always have time. Therefore, the local people employed were a great asset as they possessed intimate prior knowledge of terrain, culture and public sentiment that would have taken too much time for the British to adequately acquire themselves under given time constraints. Moreover, locals provided better alternative routes through the country that were unknown to foreigners. According to Richard Smith, Murray did considerably well in this capacity. Though Murray was not an expert cartographer himself, nor did Murray or his staff produce maps that gave great detail of the Peninsula for later use, what was produced gave British forces enough information to move quickly and avoid unnecessary marching.⁴ Yet while gains were made in this respect, General Murray neglected to address other aspects that are essential features of an intelligence community, that is, the collection of information pertaining to enemy strengths, tactics and intentions.

The creation of a more efficient system was formulated by Arthur Wellesley, later 1st Duke of Wellington, who, years earlier, had begun establishing an intelligence network during the Second Anglo-Maratha War in India, where conflict had erupted after Baji Rao II had accepted the Treaty of Bassein in 1802.⁵ Since being given his command in India, Wellesley too was well aware that information collection was of great importance if one was to be victorious in a military engagement. It was not enough to have an adequate force of soldiers who more than likely possessed superior weapons and better provisions. It was essential that an army and its

⁴ Richard H.P Smith. "Peninsular War Cartography: A New Look at the Military Mapping of General Sir George Murray and the Quartermaster General's Department," *Imago Mundi* 65, no. 2 (June 2013): 234-252. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 3, 2015).

⁵*Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "Maratha Wars", accessed November 06, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/event/Maratha-Wars>.

leadership know the terrain in which it was to fight, the most practical ways to travel to its objectives, and what kind of force it would encounter at any given point. In addition, commanders needed adequate information so as to be ready for multiple scenarios. Thus Wellesley set about directing chosen subordinates to relay all information obtained back to headquarters where it could be analyzed. On the one hand Wellesley dispatched certain officers, such as his highly regarded secretary Colonel Barry Close, to ride as near the enemy encampments as possible where they would take note of strength and position. On the other hand, as Murray had done, locals were employed, as they were able to arouse the least suspicion, infiltrate camps and glean vital information on such things as the state of the soldiers and their morale. Locals too were the best resource for gauging public opinion and loyalties.⁶

Though Wellesley realized the importance information gathering had on the outcome of military operations, and had achieved great success because of it, he nonetheless still encountered many drawbacks. One was the lack of centralization in his intelligence system. As Huw Davies has argued, Wellesley was provided with substantial information on both strategic and operation intelligence. The problem was determining what information was reliable and what was not. There was no practical way of separating reports that contained mere speculation from established fact. Wellesley was not “in a position to establish a complex collection network, which fed back to a centralized analytical hub.”⁷ Neither was Wellesley different from any other commander in trusting his own intuition over his subordinates’ reports. At times

⁶ Huw Davies, “The Influence of Intelligence on Wellington’s Art of Command,” *Intelligence and National Security FINT Intelligence and Nat. Security* 22.5 (2007): 624. Web. 20 Oct. 2015.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 622.

accurate intelligence would be ignored in favor of the commander's preconceptions. However, despite certain shortcomings, Wellesley's intelligence gathering played an essential role in the British victory in the conflict, and his experiences in India had a significant impact on his command structure during the Peninsular War. In the following year, he had already begun campaigning for a stronger intelligence organization, which greatly aided in the old preconceptions of the role of intelligence gathering. Wellington clearly saw the need, both for the present and for the future, for the integration of information that could be gathered from locals, and he also perceived a need for a more professional British intelligence system, though his plans did not extend to Ireland.

While the majority of the British Army was dispatched to mainland Europe to defeat Napoleon, a large detachment of soldiers was also sent to Ireland. In 1804 a military camp was created at the Curragh in Kildare and became the main location on the island where soldiers were trained for combat roles. The creation of this camp was largely the result of strategic thinking, as it was feared that French forces might attempt an invasion of Ireland and thus gain a foothold with which they could more easily make war with Britain. Historians such as Elizabeth Muenger have also cited the Irish Rebellion of 1798 as a contributing factor to this decision. Yet no methods of intelligence gathering like the studying of terrain or the assessment of public opinion were conducted during the conflict as was being done at the same time in Portugal and Spain. The failure to do so seems rather strange at first, as thorough knowledge of the country would be a significant prerequisite for maintaining the security of the United Kingdom, yet the reasoning for not doing this was much the same as it would be during the Anglo-Irish War. The Irish, according to British thinking, were different racially and culturally, but Ireland was nevertheless now a part of the United Kingdom, and should not be ruled with military authority. It was a far

better strategy to maintain a military presence on the island in the event of a dire emergency while at the same time creating a civil administration to conduct Irish affairs. As the nineteenth century progressed, law enforcement agencies would be tasked with keeping the peace and the military would remain the very last resource to be used in the event of widespread troubles.⁸ Thus, during the Napoleonic wars and throughout the nineteenth century, no intelligence system or new methods to gain information were established in Ireland, and the military and government really only focused on foreign nations when developing new means of intelligence methods and espionage.

What marked the division between spies of previous centuries and those who formed Wellesley's staff were the talents and character traits that latter possessed. In the days before Wellesley, individuals with seemingly no qualifications that are associated with intelligence officers today were given assignments which included assassination and the occasional listening in on their employer's rivals.⁹ In contrast, those who came to form the Corps of Guides were all well-educated and possessed attributes that in the modern era would be considered the basic qualifications needed for such things as espionage. These individuals knew the language or languages in which they were posted, learned about the people with whom they were in frequent contact and associated themselves with and gauged political opinion and sympathies to better identify and expose adversaries when the need arose. In addition, these individuals accepted the task of learning about past events in their areas that could be crucial to future operations.¹⁰

⁸ Elizabeth Muenger, *The British Military Dilemma in Ireland: Occupation Politics, 1886-1914* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 71-3.

⁹ Haswell, *Respectable Spy*, 14-15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 72-3.

When posted to a specific region, they immediately began conducting topographical surveys to determine the difficulty of the terrain on which their armies were to fight and the passages that would be easy or cumbersome to both friend and foe. The language of the area was learned, as were the customs of the locals. With this knowledge, officers could learn valuable information and endear themselves to the populace. Finally, the men given special assignments were trained in the art of cipherring and decoding messages of vital importance.

One of the most remarkable and highly regarded officers was the Scottish-born Colquhoun Grant. Grant was a career soldier and had been promoted to lieutenant just shortly after his posting in Portugal. He had come to the attention of Wellesley because of his skill in riding near and in hostile territory without being detected or captured. This was due to his genuine interest in the local population and their manners and customs. Grant was already fluent in French, and in a relatively short time learned the Portuguese language as well. When not at headquarters, he became acquainted with many locals who he met in the nearby towns and villages, and at times even participated in cultural activities such as the recitation of Portuguese literature. As he became so well liked in the various communities he was able to learn a great deal about the terrain and the mountain passes, as well as accumulate news on French movements and the feelings of the people about both the British and French. It was after Grant had made a daring ride into the mountains of Alto Alentjo, past the French General Massena's army, to bring back much needed food to his fellow soldiers that Wellesley pulled him out of his regiment and reassigned him to special duties for the rest of the campaign.¹¹

¹¹ Ibid., 132-6.

Despite a great start in the evolution of British intelligence, its progression in the years following the Napoleonic Wars was often slow. Once the great threat on the continent was eliminated, both the government and the War Office returned to their old ways. The notion of having an organization that would monitor foreign activity appealed to few when there was seemingly no threat to the nation's interest. At least part of this was due to the fact that many believed it was distasteful to have a group that would use clandestine methods to gain the upper hand in military affairs. This belief was held at the very least until the turn of the century, as Colonel G.A. Furse states in his book *Information at War*:

The very term 'spy' conveys to our mind something dishonourable and disloyal. A spy, in the general acceptance of the term, is a low sneak who, from unworthy motives, dodges the actions of his fellow beings, to turn the knowledge he acquires to his personal account. His underhand dealings inspire us with such horror that we would blush at the very idea of having to avail ourselves of any information obtained through such an agency.¹²

According to this line of thinking, it was really only proper for locals to provide information, given that they were not attached to the British in any official capacity. The military and the British administration could get what they wanted without having to employ themselves or anyone else within British society in such distasteful and dishonorable activities. Still, if many attached a stigma to covert intelligence gathering, there were still those who knew that such a service was essential and strove to keep it alive and improve its effectiveness. With Wellesley's Corps of Guides all but defunct except in India, the renewal and continuation of intelligence fell to a former Bombay Engineer Corps officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Best Jervis. Prior to his service in Bombay, Jervis had served as a cartographer for the Ordnance

¹² George Armand Furse, *Information on War: Its Acquisition and Transmission*. (London: W. Cloves and Sons, 1895), 238-239.

Survey in England. In the years following his retirement, Jervis repeatedly wrote to the Foreign Office, expressing his belief that some type of department must be established to insure the safety and stability of the British Empire. His constant petitioning was finally rewarded after he stumbled upon some valuable information while vacationing in Belgium shortly after the Crimean War had begun in 1854. By some luck Jervis was able to take into his possession two maps of the Crimea drawn up by the Russian and Austrian militaries. The maps were far superior to those held by the British, and they could not have been obtained at a more opportune time, as the British army had not yet reached the front. As a result, the War Department approved the creation of the Topographical and Statistical Department and appointed Jervis as its head, a post which he kept until his death in 1857. Though it made little progress in the fields of strategic and operation collection gathering, the Topographical and Statistical Department did make great strides in creating and improving maps. Topographical agencies were established across the Empire to record the geography and climate of the colonies, as well as on the continent.¹³

Arguably the greatest transformation, in terms of organization, to occur in the creation of the modern British military intelligence system happened between the late 1860s and early 1870s. Just as in the early years of the nineteenth-century, it was war that gave the military and the government the impetus to collect intelligence. This time, however, Britain was not a participant in the fighting, but an observer. Over a relatively short period of time, Prussia had become a great military power. Evidence of this was seen during the Austro-Prussian and Franco-Prussian Wars. In 1866, in less than three months, Prussia had defeated the German Confederation and had established the North German Confederation. Five years later France

¹³ Jock Haswell, *British Military Intelligence* (Wilmer Brothers Limited, 1973), 26-9.

capitulated, and the German Empire was established. Britain followed the events closely and was wary of the new power in Europe. Russia too, once again became a concern to the British. Under the terms of the Treaty of Paris (1856), Russia had lost its right to intervene in Turkey in the instance of Christian persecution. Additionally, Russia was forced to cede all of its bases and military activity in the Black Sea.¹⁴ However, partly as a result of France's defeat, Russia announced that the articles of the treaty no longer applied. For Great Britain this created a serious threat to the Middle East, and, more importantly, to the Suez Canal, the main route linking it to India.¹⁵

With potential threats to Great Britain and its colonies on the rise, Major Charles Wilson took it upon himself to transform the Topographical and Statistical Department and enlarge it so as to really deal with military intelligence beyond just mapmaking and cataloging. In 1873, following Wilson's and others' recommendations, the T&S Department transitioned into the Intelligence Branch, and Major-General Sir Patrick McDougall was appointed its first Director of Military Intelligence (DMI). At long last, a system was in place that designated officers to certain functions in intelligence. One group was responsible for the collection aspect itself, a second carefully analyzed the information given, and a third reported on the information deemed to be useful or of interest. Moreover, the newly established Intelligence Branch assigned officers to specific nations or group of nations. A section was even created to look at Great Britain itself, the first time a permanent government body materialized to look into subterfuge and foreign

¹⁴ Tarus Hunczak (ed.), *Russian Imperialism: From Ivan the Great to the Revolution*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1974), 226.

¹⁵ Thomas G. Fergusson, *British Military*, 54-5.

espionage at home. Nine years later the Admiralty followed suit and created its own Intelligence Division.¹⁶

The Intelligence Division of the army was further refined and coordinated in the wake of the Boer War. Though the British had once again been victorious in an overseas conflict, the cost had been tremendous and completely unexpected. Very few at the time would have thought it possible for a largely rural people to be of much threat to a professional standing army that had shown its superior fighting capabilities over much of the globe. Yet the Boers proved to be formidable opponents. Abandoning conventional warfare, the Boers moved quietly and quickly in small formations over terrain that they knew in depth. Though lacking somewhat in manpower, they more than made up for it in their superior marksmanship and ability to camouflage themselves, resulting in significant British loss of life and supplies. During 1899, during what was referred to as Black Week, the Boer Republics scored three major victories over the British at Stormberg, Magersfontein and Colenso. In all, close to three thousand British soldiers were killed over a course of just five days.¹⁷

Naturally, as a result of such devastating and humiliating losses, the public and the government searched for the party that was to blame for the events. In a short matter of time, the finger was pointed at the Intelligence Branch and its current director, Major-General Sir John Ardagh. Officials stated that Ardagh and his officers had failed in the years preceding the war to gauge the Boer Republics to see if there were any indications that they would instigate hostilities.

¹⁶ Constantine Fitzgibbon, *Secret Intelligence in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Stein and Day, 1977), 95.

¹⁷ Fergusson, *British Military*, 103.

If they had made investigations and found signs of a coming war, then they had failed to report them to the government. As for the war itself, the army was not informed of Boer strength, movements or armaments. The year after the war had ended, Ardagh was called before the Committee of Imperial Defence, and great care was taken into looking at the accusations. What the committee finally concluded surprised many, not least Ardagh's opponents.

As to the accusation that the government no warning of an impending conflict, it was determined that since 1896 the Intelligence Branch had written and dispatched numerous reports on the high probability of Boer aggression. Not only this, but reports indicated the war would not be some type of small skirmish that would be over quickly, and great loss of life was expected. The accusation that there were no reports on Boer strength was similarly refuted. Just prior to the outbreak of war, the Intelligence Division had published a book which listed, quite accurately, the number of field pieces in the Boer arsenal and the number of men available for active service. Remarkably, intelligence was so well gathered and disseminated that the total amount of ammunition available to the Boers was only slightly off. Even more amazing, all of this had been accomplished with very little money furnished by the government. The historian Jock Haswell asserted that around this time, Ardagh had requested from the government a budget of £10,000 annually, but was only allotted the small sum of £100.¹⁸

Since the Napoleonic Wars up through the colonial skirmishes and the Crimean War, intelligence organizations in one form or another had played a significant role in the preparation and outcome of the conflicts. Wellington's Corps of Guides had proved itself capable of assessing and determining enemy movements, which had stopped the army from making

¹⁸ Haswell, *Military Intelligence*, 56.

unnecessary retreats and advances. Under Jervis, the geography and terrain of foreign lands had aided in the planning and movements of British troops in the Crimea. However, in each event there had been instances of leaders, both in politics and the army, who had ignored reports that were well founded, resulting in great loss and embarrassment. From the viewpoint of the military a commander's intuition and past experiences were seen as more credible than anything else when it came to operational and strategic planning. No doubt due in part to this notion, the government gave the intelligence community no real power or authority in matters of warfare. Only grudgingly did it finally acquiesce and create an intelligence section in the mid-nineteenth century. But even then, the Director of Military Intelligence had no real persuasive power outside of his own post, and he could not force the high command to accept information, no matter how critical and accurate it might be.¹⁹

In the end, the Committee of Imperial Defence concluded that the Intelligence Division could not be blamed for the unfortunate events of the Boer War. With little financial support and authority, it had done its duty, even if few had actually heeded its advice. Despite an awful war for the British and considerable negative publicity for Ardagh and his staff, the realization that the intelligence section was effective and instrumental in modern warfare resulted greatly in its growth and power. During and immediately after the war, at the behest of Lord Wolseley, the government began reforming the structure of the War Office. Among one of the reforms was a promotion of sorts for the Intelligence Division. In 1901 the Intelligence Division became the Intelligence Department. This made the director a member of the War Office Council, a discussion that permitted him to sit in on the meetings of the Defence Committee. The reform still did not give him any executive power with which to force the military to take action based

¹⁹ Ibid., 72-4.

upon his department's findings, though his presence could do much to persuade commanders to heed his advice.

Among other things, the War Office reforms made it official that the Intelligence Department would from then on have a permanent staff in both peacetime and war, which greatly helped to increase military intelligence and create subsections dealing with previously unobserved nations. For example, intelligence officers were posted in Japan in 1903, shortly after the Anglo-Japanese alliance. Here, the officers took to learning Japanese and began assessing such things as public opinion. At the same time, ever greater attention was given to the Middle East and its stability. Finally, the Intelligence Department was reorganized and the three sections became the Strategical Subdivision, the Foreign and Indian Subdivision and the Special Duties Subdivision.²⁰

The reorganization and heightened power could not have been better timed. For although Russia was still perceived as a great threat to India and the British Empire's possessions in the east, German foreign policy and naval expansion were becoming ever more troubling. By the 1890s, Germany's relations with other nations, in particular Great Britain, had soured considerably. Before and during the Boer War Kaiser Wilhelm II and German patriots praised Paul Kruger and the Dutch Republics for their stand against the British. At seemingly every turn Germany criticized British colonial affairs. By the turn of the century Anglo-German relations were very much strained.²¹

²⁰ Fergusson, *British Military*, 114-19.

²¹ Gordon A. Craig, *Germany, 1866-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 242-50.

Even more alarming than diplomatic disintegration was Germany's intensive shipbuilding program. Since the 1880s, Admiral von Tirpitz had espoused his belief to the Emperor that Great Britain was intentionally blocking German efforts to expand as a colonial power, and its ability to grow economically. In his opinion, the only way to resolve this was to build a navy that was equal to or better than that of Britain's. Moreover, Tirpitz believed that the key to naval superiority lay in battleships. Over time, Tirpitz converted so many within the upper echelons of the German government to naval expansion that the Reichstag allotted a vast sum of money to the building of 19 battleships and even larger number of supporting vessels.²² Lesser known by the public at the time, Germany was also in the midst of redrawing strategies for a land campaign on both the Western and Eastern Fronts, which was eventually titled the Schlieffen Plan. While Tirpitz was busy working on the navy, Alfred von Schlieffen turned his attention to creating a strategy that could effectively fight a war on both sides of the empire.²³

Naturally, the aggressive German diplomacy and rumors of military expansion eventually spread to the press, and anti-German sentiment and paranoia swept through the public sphere. This was greatly helped along by writers capitalizing on the fear of future German aggression, and additionally, fear of the lower and middle classes. One of them was William Le Queux, who published his fiction novel *The Invasion of 1910* in 1906. In it, Le Queux wrote that the German invasion was successful in large part because the German government had dispatched numerous undercover agents to the Isles, who had learned the intimate details of British fortifications, bases and capabilities. All of these agents were under the guise of middle or lower-middle class

²² Ibid, 304-312.

²³ Arden Bucholz, *Moltke, Schlieffen, and Prussian War Planning* (Providence, RI: Berg, 1993), 195-213.

workers, such as clerks and servants. Le Queux followed up on his popular work and wrote another book on foreign espionage in Britain, as did others. The result was a public that believed German spies were lurking everywhere. David French asserted that in 1907, the *Morning Post* claimed “90,000 German reservists and spies were in Britain, and that arms for them were stored in every major city.”²⁴

At the same time of the growing anti-German sentiment and fear, Irish nationalists had begun a series of terror campaigns in the heart of the empire. With considerable backing and manpower from Irish-Americans, nationalists conducted a series of bombings in England throughout the 1880s.²⁵ While there were a few casualties that resulted because of the bombings and some damage to British infrastructure, Fenian efforts came to very little. In part this was due to disorganization in the nationalist ranks and the inexperience of those individuals in handling explosive material. Yet largely this was the result of excellent work of Britain’s law enforcement agencies and the steps they took to foil these attacks. Unbeknownst to Irish nationalists, the police were aware of many of the planned attacks and had infiltrated many of the nationalist cells across the island. Police relied on informants for crucial information, and a “Fenian Office” was created at Scotland Yard, which turned into the Special Branch in 1883.²⁶ With the information gathered from informants, personal conversations with the populace and surveillance of political meetings, notes and oral statements were subsequently compiled, copied

²⁴ David French, “Spy Fever in Britain, 1900-1915,” *The Historical Journal* 21.02 (1978): 355-56. JSTOR [JSTOR]. Web. 22 Oct. 2015.

²⁵ Patrick Quinlivan and Paul Rose, *The Fenians in England, 1865-1872: A Sense of Insecurity* (New York: Riverrun Press, 1982), 1-7.

²⁶ Ray Wilson and Ian Adams, *Special Branch: A History, 1883-2006* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2015), 343-548, Kindle.

and transmitted to other police stations where they could be referenced and built upon as new information was received. The police in England were given further assistance by Britain's embassy in the United States, which during this time wired Scotland Yard with the latest news on Irish-American activities and lists of individuals traveling to the United Kingdom. This provided another helpful means of preventing terrorist acts. The establishment of this new branch, however, did not result in lasting changes in intelligence policies and procedure which had been seen in the military. In cases like the Fenian bombings, the police were given some temporary new means of gathering intelligence, particularly the aid of government agencies relaying messages from other countries and the combined efforts to eliminate violent threats on the mainland. Yet, inter-departmental cooperation and government support was only given during times of great apprehension, and also not equally given to all regions of the empire. This was especially true for the police forces in Ireland, namely, the Royal Irish Constabulary and the Dublin Metropolitan Police. In much the same way that the British had felt in the previous decades that spying or espionage was dishonorable and reputable for soldiers of the Crown to implement so as to obtain information, so too was this sentiment felt in regards to the keeping of law and order in Ireland. It was one thing to implement secret espionage methods on other nations and foreigners who resided within the United Kingdom, and quite another to employ them for use on those were recognized as British subjects, even if they were often perceived to be different in certain respects. Indeed the Irish were, throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, seen and often depicted as inferior in comparison to the English. As Michael de Nie has shown in his work, *The Eternal Paddy: Irish Identity and the British Press, 1798-*

1882, the British viewed the Irish people as racially and culturally inferior.²⁷ What was needed was British paternalism that would transform the Irish into model subjects who would embrace the same values and lifestyle as the rest of the United Kingdom. In light of this, it was seen as the best policy not to take any drastic action against them that could potentially lead to more dissatisfaction and resentment of the Crown, just as it had been the policy during the Napoleonic era. Undertaking such actions as placing British agents in Irish communities could do much more harm than good if their true intentions were exposed.²⁸ There was a feeling shared by many in England, both civilians and politicians alike, that some Americans were using the struggle for Irish independence as a pretext to wage war on the nation both to gain money from mercenary activity and to strike back for Britain's ambiguous policies during the American Civil War.

Thus, the British authorities largely held the belief that it was the work of outsiders who were really the cause of the violence and anti-British sentiment, not a grassroots Irish movement. "A favourite theme [by the English], wrote Patrick O'Farrell, "was that the Irish were an emotional and credulous people, gullible and easily led, who had become the victims of agitators and malcontents. Remove these destructible and corruptive forces and the population would become open to the processes of 'permanent civilization'."²⁹ Beliefs such as these then deterred policymakers from creating or implementing a more sophisticated intelligence network within

²⁷ Michael de Nie, *The Eternal Paddy: Irish Identity and the British Press, 1798-1882* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 147-8.

²⁸ Bernard Porter, *Plots and Paranoia: A History of Political Espionage in Britain, 1790-1988* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 105-6.

²⁹ Patrick James O'Farrell, *England and Ireland since 1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 52.

the Irish police forces as had been done in the British armed forces, and, to a certain extent, the police in England. The police in England, especially in London, were granted greater powers because of the political significance of the region. Ireland was legally, a part of the United Kingdom, but the protection of the capital took precedent over outlying regions.³⁰

Although many probably doubted the severity or extent of the German threat (for instance the claim that nearly 100,000 Germans were plotting the invasion and overthrow of the United Kingdom), the intelligence community was sufficiently alarmed to make a serious effort to identify and locate any foreigners suspected of trying to acquire vital British secrets. The combined fears of possible invasion and the Fenian movement prompted modernization efforts that resulted in the creation of a British intelligence agency that has survived and evolved to the present day, refined by several reorganizations and sometimes renamed, but retaining the commitment of its original form as a subcommittee of the Committee of Imperial Defence. That subcommittee, at the behest of Prime Minister Asquith, met for the first time in March 1909 under the leadership of Richard Burdon Haldane.³¹

During the three sessions that took place, it was deemed necessary for an agency to be established that would be outside of both the War Office and the Admiralty, but would cooperate and work with them in the gathering of intelligence and counter intelligence. It would have three main functions. The first would be monitoring the Admiralty and War Office to detect and eliminate any foreign agents who may have infiltrated government agencies. Second, members of the organization would take postings in numerous areas across the country and work with

³⁰ Porter, *Plots and Paranoia*, 135-7.

³¹ Fergusson, *British Military*, 220-2.

local police in finding spies throughout the empire. Third, it would conduct operations abroad and relay information that it thought crucial or significant back to the government. By June of that year, the Secret Service Bureau was officially created, and during the First World War, the section dealing with domestic affairs was given the title British Security Service (MI5), with the foreign section being the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6). Vernon Kell was the first Director of MI5, and would remain in this position until the start of the Second World War, and the post of Director of the Secret Intelligence Service was given to Mansfield Smith-Cumming.

Both sections of the Secret Service Bureau were to make great contributions before and during the war. From its beginning, MI5 recruited both military and civilian personnel into its ranks. All of these individuals were extremely gifted in one field of study or another. For the first time, scientists were enlisted to help in information gathering, as were women. As discussed during the committee meetings, local law enforcement agencies were indeed kept informed of any concerns within their jurisdictions, and in turn the police kept extensive files on suspicious activity and individuals who were thought to be German or sympathetic to the German cause. These reports were sent to the Admiralty and cataloged for future use. Intelligence had become so well organized in the years after 1909 that on the day after Britain entered the war, twenty-one German agents who had been closely watched were quickly seized and imprisoned. Aside from spy catching, Kell's section also proved itself adept at monitoring German activity near the British coast. Under its subsection in the Admiralty, Admiral William Reginald Hall set up a mix of civilians and sailors whose task it was to break German naval codes. Though initially progress was slow in coming, Hall's team eventually got a break when in August the Russian Navy sank the German cruiser *Magdeburg*, which had on board the German Naval signal book. After its discovery, the Russians had passed along a copy to the

British. With this information in their possession, the naval intelligence section soon cracked German ciphers, which resulted in the sinking of four destroyers in the Heligoland Bight. In December of the same year, while trawling in the area of the sunken destroyers, a British fishing vessel snagged its nets on some of the debris. Upon taking some of it aboard, they discovered an even greater number of signal books. From them, Hall and his people had an even easier time deciphering code, as they were continuations of the first they had acquired.³² Furthermore, British intelligence scored another great victory when it uncovered a plot by Irish nationalists to ship firearms and ammunition in from Germany for purposes of armed insurrection in 1916. In May of that year, Roger Casement, who had been making attempts to recruit Irish prisoners-of-war in Germany, and many other members of the Irish nationalist movement were apprehended by British authorities for their part in making plans for the 1916 Easter Rising.³³ However, just as during the Irish War of Independence, politics were to interfere with any further progress in the conduct and gathering of intelligence in Ireland. Although native Irishmen were caught smuggling firearms into Great Britain, there was great reluctance on the part of the government to take any further action as it was believed that anti-British sentiment was shared by only a very select minority and not actually condoned or accepted by the majority of the Irish people, a sentiment very similar to that espoused during the Fenian movement.

The Secret Intelligence Service achieved similar victories abroad. Prior to the war, agents had been sent to neutral countries, such as Switzerland and Belgium, to procure information. While there, they made contacts with the native people and had in time recruited

³² Constantine Fitzgibbon, *Secret Intelligence in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Stein and Day, 1977), 95-108.

³³ Paul McMahon, *British Spies and Irish Rebels: British Intelligence and Ireland, 1916-1945* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2011), 23-4.

people sympathetic to the British cause or who had some other reason to see that Germany was defeated. Keith Jeffery wrote in his *Secret History of MI6* of a successful operation carried out in Belgium involving a female operative. After a time, British agents had recruited a Belgian woman, whose task it was to become close to a particular German secret agent. Once gaining his trust, the German secret service recruited her and sent her on an assignment to France, where she reported on the enemy cell. Soon after, the German agents and their operations were identified, and their entire organization was destroyed.³⁴

The creation of a British intelligence community had taken a long time to come to fruition. It was Arthur Wellesley, First Duke of Wellington, who had thought it crucial to have some system outside of the regular army's duties to advance into enemy held territory for forward reconnaissance to determine enemy strengths and motives. With the expertise and adventurous nature of men such as Colquhoun Grant, much strategical and operational intelligence was recorded that saved the army time and casualties. Yet for all of its effectiveness, Wellington's Corps of Guides was doomed to disintegrate in the following decades, in part due to ethical concepts and frequent refusal of military leaders to believe any reports that were not consistent with their own beliefs and past experiences.

Some progress had been made under Jervis, who had helped found the Topographical and Statistical Department, and still more under Charles Wilson with his Intelligence Branch. Yet it was only after the loss of life and strategic failures during the Boer War and the growing fear of German aggression and Fenian terrorism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century that the government was persuaded to create an intelligence agency that had actual authority, and one

³⁴ Keith Jeffery, *The Secret History of MI6, 1909-1949* (New York: Penguin Press, 2010), 1323, Kindle.

that would operate around the world in both peace and war. Thus, the Committee of Imperial Defence established the Secret Service Bureau, which was further subdivided into foreign and domestic intelligence. Through better organization and a more stable financial situation, both subdivisions proved during the First World War that Great Britain finally achieved a modern, efficient intelligence community. However, as organized and modernized as British intelligence had become over the years, much remained the same as it had been for over a century in Ireland and for Irish law enforcement. As a result of cultural and racial bias, lingering feelings toward espionage, and political weariness, the Irish police were left largely with the old methods of collecting intelligence through the means of personal knowledge and intuition, and only later in the midst of the Anglo-Irish War were intelligence methods put into place that had developed and evolved through British interventions in foreign nations and activities in England through the course of over a century.

CHAPTER IV

BRITISH INTELLIGENCE

As analyzed in the previous chapter, scholars, as well as professional intelligence analysts, have over the decades repeatedly surmised that the Irish police forces, and, later, the British army, were completely overwhelmed by the I.R.A. and the intelligence organization of Michael Collins. The rebels always seemed to slip through the fingers of the Crown authorities, and were victorious on many fronts, such as assassinations of R.I.C. constables, the acquisition of firearms from police barracks, and the capture of documents revealing the names of British intelligence sources. Frustration is suggested in the army staff's post-conflict report entitled *The Situation in Ireland at the end of 1919 to April 1920*, in which it was lamented that since the outbreak of hostilities had begun, "the ranks of the [R.I.C.] force had been depleted, and many men, through intimidation of themselves or more often of their families, had been induced to resign."¹ This dismal view, however, seems to overlook the fact that the police, however demoralized officials later claimed them to be, regularly sought out and found active members of the I.R.A and Sinn Féin during the same period. While the nationalists could claim various victories, so too could the Crown forces, though there is little literature in the public domain today affirming this point. The British army, as well, following the government's sanction of a more offensive posture for the military, had its share of triumphs in the intelligence war. Although neither the police forces nor the army were able to achieve an ultimate victory, the greater blame for the collapse of the British Administration in Ireland was the ineptitude of

¹ The Record of the Rebellion in Ireland, 1919-1921 and the Part Played by the Army in Dealing with it, in Kautt, *Ground Truths*, 24.

vacillating politicians and their inability to settle on any one concrete plan which would make information gathering more efficient. The police and the army, were, in their respective efforts, able to counter nationalist militancy in the three years of the official conflict, yet without a unified political stance and political sanction to convict and hold enemy combatants effectively, they were incapable of completely crushing the opposition or even bringing it to a sufficiently weakened state that would give the British the upper hand in negotiations before the truce in July 1921.

It seemed early on that there were only two feasible options to deal with Irish unrest: all-out military operations, with the implication that the Crown and the Irish were enemies; or the seemingly more palatable course of treating the entire conflict as a law-and-order matter to be dealt with by civilians, thereby allowing the Government, in appearance at least, to pin the troubles on a criminal minority of its loyal Irish subjects. The latter option was desired by most in the government, especially the Liberals. They believed, in the main, that militant nationalists should and could be crushed, after which more moderate members such as those in Sinn Féin could then begin negotiations regarding the fate of Ireland.

In spite of the reservations of some, Winston Churchill and Lloyd George believed the Third Home Rule Bill could finally be enacted, which they were confident would pacify Irish militancy. Churchill's frustration with the whole Irish matter was evident when he wrote that "as the deluge subsides and the waters fall short we see the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone emerging once again. The integrity of their quarrel is one of the few institutions that has been

unaltered in the cataclysm [WW1] which has swept the world.”² Yet both he and Lloyd George believed that there was still room to salvage the situation and turn it into a more favorable position for the British. For their part, the Liberals had been pushing for Home Rule since 1886, having been frustrated in their efforts by Conservative opponents and external developments and crises. Although passage in some form was broadly assumed to be inevitable by most Liberals and Conservatives as early as 1914, debate raged regarding various important facets of an eventual home rule.

Favoring the non-military option, Churchill and Lloyd George were faced with the practical problem: How could the government achieve pacification and proceed to talks with the seemingly more moderate nationalists? They concluded that the police should continue to bear the brunt of rebellion and leave the army in a strictly defensive and supportive role, lest a military atmosphere provoke further unrest. Evidence of Lloyd George’s firm belief that this was the better option is his statement to the Cabinet as late as June 1921 that “the Irish Job...was a policeman’s job.”³

Having thorough knowledge of their respective communities, police officers who had not given in to intimidation, threats or boycott were consistently making arrests across the island. In March 1919 police arrested I.R.A director of publicity and Sinn Féin MP Piaras Béaslai in Dublin, along with MP for Cork J.J. Walsh and a Mr. Sean O’Loughlin for their part in a nationalist demonstration.⁴ Later that same month, the *Irish Independent* reported the arrests of

² Alan J. Ward, "Churchill and the Anglo-Irish War, 1919-1922." *Churchill Proceedings*. N.p., 2009. Web. 25 June 2016. <<http://www.winstonchurchill.org/publications/finest-hour/finest-hour-143/churchill-proceedings-churchill-and-the-anglo-irish-war-1919-1922>>.

³ Thomas Jones, *Whitehall Diary, 1916-1925 vol. 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 184.

men the authorities had been surveilling and pursuing. These individuals were apprehended for their part in an attempted raid for arms and explosive substances.⁵ These and many other arrests had been preceded by the capture of Eámon de Valera, Arthur Griffith and W.T. Cosgrave in 1918.⁶ Between the years 1916 and 1919, the I.R.A itself reported the number of arrests and deportations of their own as being approximately 2,076.⁷ These results were accomplished with little reliance on formal intelligence techniques that would be used in future years or that are commonly labeled as intelligence operations by most today. What the police relied upon instead, especially during these early years and later on in a more limited capacity, was human intelligence, or HUMINT.⁸

Prior to 1919, there were only two small groups within the realm of Irish law enforcement that constituted anything like a formal, clandestine information-gathering service, one being the Crime Special Branch of the Royal Irish Constabulary, and the other the so-called ‘G’ Division of the Dublin Metropolitan Police.⁹ In much the same fashion as the London police, the G Division was divided into three separate sections: political, routine crime and

⁴ “Sinn Fein Arrests: Another M.P. in Prison.” *Irish Independent* (Dublin), March 6, 1919. All newspaper articles were found in the Irish Newspaper Archive online database, <https://www.irishnewarchive.com>.

⁵ “The Tipperary Arrests,” *Freemans Journal*. March 6, 1919.

⁶ “Principal Arrests: De Valera and Griffith,” *Irish Independent*, May 18, 1918.

⁷ Richard Mulcahy Summary of Outrages Committed by the British Government, 2 October, 1919: Richard Mulcahy Papers, University College Dublin Archives P7/35(7).

⁸ .Hittle. *Michael Collins and the Anglo-Irish War: Britain’s Counterinsurgency Failure* (DC: Potomac Books, 2011), 14.

⁹ Hart. *British Intelligence*, 4.

carriage supervision. As its name implies, the political section focused on the monitoring of nationalist movements and all those suspected of working against the preservation of British rule. The routine crime section was responsible for everyday criminal activity, whether it be burglary, larceny or murder. Though separated as they were officially from one another, they worked in conjunction during the conflict when they found themselves engaged in the detection and apprehension of the same individuals, namely those in Sinn Féin and the I.R.A.¹⁰ These two special branches provided essential assistance to the government, although they faced numerous obstacles over the years. In late January 1920 Charles Redmond, who had been appointed to further reorganize the detective division, was assassinated. Mismanagement and neglect by Augustine Birrell during his tenure as Chief Secretary of Ireland, who disbanded the Secret Service department in Ireland in 1917 due to his belief that the G Division and the R.I.C. were sufficient, also hampered the intelligence gathering efforts.¹¹ Still, human intelligence, collected by both constables and loyalists, would continue to produce the greatest results in 1919 and early 1920.

No better witness to these results are some of the nationalists who worked within the police forces. Though a confessed nationalist spy within the D.M.P and associate of Michael Collins, Ned Broy could not help but recognize the efficiency and proven methods that the police used in curbing anti-British activity. Whatever the difficulties that police constables had in being

¹⁰ Eámon Broy, Witness Statement 1280, www.bureaumilitaryhistory.ie, June, 19, 2016. “The Bureau of Military History will subsequently be referred to as ‘BMH’ and the witness statements as ‘WS.’”

¹¹ *Record of the Rebellion in Ireland, 1919-1921 and the Part Played by the Army in Dealing with it: The Situation in Ireland at the end 1919 to April 1920* in Kautt. *Ground Truths*, 21-4.

accepted members of their respective communities after the Sinn Féin boycott of the police, they more than made up for in their abilities to glean information that would lead to satisfactory information and results. Ordinary citizens, as well, often attempted to deprive civil authorities of information pertaining to nationalist activities. Law enforcement officers were quick to adapt to such measures, and deployed new tactics to improve results. Recollecting his participation in the independence movement some years after the fact, Broy divulged some of the ways in which the police were able to obtain their information. In one instance, Broy wrote:

When it was thought that members of a family had information which the R.I.C. needed, a constable would be sent on a bicycle to their house. When nearing the house he would deliberately puncture one of his tyres with a pin. Then he would call at the house for a basin of water to locate the puncture and, whilst carrying out the repairs, would enter into conversation with members of the family and gradually lead up to the subject in which he was interested. Members of the family would thus, quite innocently, supply the Constable with all the local gossip, and when the 'repairs' were finished the constable would have the information he needed to supply a very valuable report to Dublin Castle and perhaps also to supply the police with clues as to where to institute further enquiries.

In another instance Broy wrote that:

Every area had had its quota of loyal citizens and the local I.R.A furnished them with an excellent focal point. They not only supplied information of which (as they were mostly employers of labour) they had excellent resources, but spurred on the R.I.C. to still greater efforts and wrote to the higher officers or to the Castle if they considered members of the local force not sufficiently energetic. As many of these loyalists were also magistrates and their words were practically law in their local areas, it will be realised what a deadly menace they constituted to all nationalist movements.¹²

All of the information gained in this manner was carefully and meticulously recorded by the police officers and copied into log books or, more specifically, Occurrence Books, to which officers of any district or county could refer for further investigations, surveillance and arrests.

¹² Eámon Broy, WS 1280, BMH, June 19, 2016.

Even details that could seem to be insignificant at the time were documented in the event they would prove to help in a case at some point in the future, such as weather and meteorological conditions. The “Occurrence Book has a note of the state of the weather daily like a ship’s log. This is not as crazy as it sounds because the weather could have a bearing on crime.”¹³ All of this thorough data collection produced innumerable positive results for the Crown forces and no lack of harm and anxiety for the Irish nationalists. Aside from the high-profile arrests of men like Eámon de Valera mentioned previously, nationalists of all ranks and degrees of importance were being caught in the police net throughout 1919 and early 1920. Referring to 1919, I.R.A. officer Laurence Nugent recollected that the “Volunteers were getting uneasy and in country districts the police were giving a lot of trouble. The agent provocateur was at work again. Volunteers everywhere were being arrested and imprisoned.”¹⁴ During the same time period, as evidenced by another I.R.A. veteran, Joseph Lawless, police officers in Dublin were scoring great victories as well, stamping out adversaries both military and political:

Daily raids then began on all the offices and buildings believed to be occupied by the various Dáil departments and, where any evidence of such occupation was found, the clerical staffs were arrested as well as any others found on the premises. It was in this way that my father, Dick McKee, Dermot O’Hegarty and others were arrested in a raid which occurred on 11th November, 1919, on No. 6 Harcourt St. which contained one of Mick Collins’s offices with the Dáil Department of Finance.¹⁵

By May 1920, the police force had been given another means of combating and further putting pressure on Sinn Féin and the I.R.A with the appointment of Ormonde de l’Épee Winter

¹³ Thomas Jones and Keith Middlemas (eds.), *Whitehall Diary* (Oxford University Press, 1969.), 106.

¹⁴ Laurence Nugent, WS 0907, BMH, June 19, 2016.

¹⁵ Joseph Lawless. WS 1043, BMH, June 19, 2016.

as the Chief of Police, replacing General Henry Tudor in this capacity. Specifically, Winter was appointed as Chief of Police to “reorganis[e] an Intelligence system”¹⁶, which under the circumstances he did extraordinarily well. Upon taking his position in Ireland, Winter began to centralize police intelligence, setting up a main headquarters in Dublin at which all information could and would be analyzed and disseminated. Still relying on information obtained from word of mouth, Winter went further, establishing a method of enemy identification that was at the time still in its infancy. This system, referred to today as document exploitation, or DOCEX¹⁷, compiled photographs and documents of the accused and suspected members of nationalist organizations and delivered the information and findings from headquarters to the outlying districts. This greatly contributed to the location and arrest of individuals who before this system was put into place could travel virtually undetected across counties as they were unknown in both description and actual appearance to authorities who did not work in the particular region from whence they came.

Tadhg Dwyer, a commandant in county Tipperary who had been arrested before for republican activity, was caught again due to this system. “This time, from some captured documents, the police had discovered my rank and I was taken to Cork, where I was charged before a military court...”¹⁸ Others who had before evaded British authorities were identified through previously obtained and then copied photographs. Michael McCormack recalled that after he was caught he was finally imprisoned after comparisons were made between photographs. After being taken into custody, “our photographs were compulsorily taken.” Some

¹⁶ Hart, *British Intelligence in Ireland*, 66.

¹⁷ Hittle, *Counterinsurgency Failure*, 231

¹⁸ Tadhg Dwyer, WS 1356, BMH, July 20, 2016.

weeks later while still in detention, “I was shown what was supposed to be my photograph,” and despite his denial that he was not the man pictured, he was transferred to an internment camp outside of the Curragh until the conflict had ended.¹⁹ Other documents obtained by the police exposed and foiled future I.R.A. operations, and their capture at times even brought criticism by ordinary nationalists towards their superiors. “One of the greatest offenders in the loss of important documents was the Chief of Staff, Richard Mulcahy,” remembered Richard Walsh. “On two or three occasions very important documents in his custody were captured by the British. One of these captured documents related to the blockade and immobilization of the Liverpool docks. Another captured document gave orders for the poisoning of British transport horses in military garrisons in this country.”²⁰ To collect this data, Winter formed a “Raid Bureau” which collected these documents and I.R.A membership rosters and copied them for further use within Dublin Castle.²¹ Under Winter’s leadership, the Irish police forces, using methods very similar in scope to those used by the secret service organizations in England before and after the First World War, were able to capture and uncover a number of high-profile I.R.A members and cause considerable damage to the overall morale of the republican forces.

Perhaps one of the greatest achievements of Winter’s Raid Bureau was the uncovering and arrest of Eámon Broy in 1920. As mentioned earlier, Eámon “Ned” Broy was a detective with the D.M.P. at Dublin Castle, and since 1919 had acted as a double agent for Michael Collins. Officially a typist with the department through the latter half of his career, Broy would,

¹⁹ Ibid. 31.

²⁰ Richard Walsh, WS 0400, BMH, July 20, 2016.

²¹ Ormonde Winter, *Winters Tale: An Autobiography* (Ann Arbor, MI: Richards Press, 1955), 296-302.

when he was so able to do so, copy police reports and bits of evidence he deemed to be important to Collins and the rest of the Irish intelligence community.²² Broy was indeed able to convey some important information to Collins, but he was not as secretive as he believed himself to be. Officials within the division knew that information was being leaked from the inside, and, in early December 1920, Broy was exposed after one of Winter's raiding parties discovered large volumes of copied paperwork from the department stored elsewhere in Dublin. The papers had been stored in the home of a confidante by the name of Eilen McGrane, and "it became clear to the British that Broy was the culprit, he being the typist at the time in question."²³ This deprived Collins of a great source of information.

Winter's raids were also credited for the apprehension and death of notable I.R.A officer Sean Treacy. Treacy, like Dan Breen, had made a name for himself beginning with his participation in the Solheadbeg ambush in 1919, which had resulted in two police casualties.²⁴ Later, Treacy participated in Collins' Squad, taking part in assassinations and assassination attempts across Dublin, notably the failed attempt on the life of Lord French, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland since 1918.²⁵ Sean Treacy had therefore been a wanted man for some time, and it was under the leadership of Winter that he was finally caught. With secondary support given by the army, the D.M.P began main surveillance sweeps and raids across Dublin in October 1920. The primary target at this time was Dan Breen, who was known by the British to be hiding

²²Eámon Broy, WS 1280, BMH, July 20, 2016.

²³David Neligan, *The Spy in the Castle* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1968), 107-8.

²⁴ Dan Breen, *My Fight for Irish Freedom* (Dublin: Anvil Books. Reprint, 1993), 43-7.

²⁵ Joe Ambrose, *Seán Treacy and the Tan War* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2008), 113.

somewhere in the city, but Treacy was a valuable target as well. Close on their quarry's trail, the British authorities had already located the two men earlier in the month, wounding both in a shootout before the two were able to make good their escape. However, unbeknownst to Treacy, British intelligence agents were still shadowing him after he and Breen had split up. Finally, while making plans for an escape out of the city at Republican Outfitters on Talbot Street, Treacy exposed his exact whereabouts to his pursuers and, in the course of the next few minutes, was shot dead while trying to evade capture on a stolen bicycle.²⁶

Aside from his organizational accomplishments in developing a more thorough document processing system that led to the capture and deaths of men such as those listed above, Ormonde Winter also developed a more clandestine group of men who detected and followed republicans and presented a great hindrance to nationalist forces. Mentioned earlier, there was a group which operated in much the same way as this earlier in the conflict, often called the Cairo Gang. Many of these individuals were eventually assassinated by Michael Collins' Squad on 21 November 1920, and this has led to the opinion that undercover British intelligence officers were easily identified and could not make any real progress in defeating their adversaries. The overemphasis on the Cairo Gang and the deaths of many of its members have however overshadowed other similar British organizations that did not meet with such a fate and continued to score victories against the I.R.A. Unlike the Black and Tans and the Auxiliaries, who were to supplement the decrease in police constables, these individuals were recruited directly from Ireland instead of England, Scotland and Wales, and were all selected for their skill in matters such as these. In his recollections, Winter wrote that "most of the candidates had been members of the Forces, and the

²⁶ Desmond Ryan, "Death of Seán Treacy," in *Dublin's Fighting Story, 1916-1921: Told by the Men Who Made It*, ed. Brian O. Conchubhair (Cork: Mercier Press, 2010), 270-6.

conduct of each was carefully scrutinized by the police before enlistment.”²⁷ Perhaps the most successful and well documented of these operatives was Eugene Igoe, who led the operations. Igoe was a native of county Mayo and a veteran constable in the R.I.C. before taking on the tasks assigned by Winter. According to historian Tim Pat Coogan, Igoe “would have been an ideal member of the Squad himself,” being so successful in carrying out his duties.²⁸ He and his subordinates operated largely within Dublin, and during late 1920 and early 1921 made numerous arrests and assassinations on their own accord, prompting Michael Collins on several occasions to dispatch some of his best agents to eliminate Igoe once and for all and put an end to his activities.

Edward Kelliher remembered, “I was one of many Intelligence officers detailed to trail and observe the movements of this gang.” He and a number of other officers at one point lay in waiting near Arran Quay where it was believed the Igoe Gang would be located, but their actions on that particular day proved to be fruitless, as did their follow-up attempts. “On arriving there [at Arran Quay] I informed the squad and we proceeded up to Thomas St. where we waited for nearly an hour, but there was no sign of the Igoe Gang. Several mornings after that I again tried to contact them, but failed. There was nothing very definite about their movements; they were most elusive.”²⁹ The last concentrated attempt to find and eliminate Igoe and his men involved members of Collins’ GHQ which again proved to be a failure, not to mention an embarrassment for Irish intelligence. Early in January 1921, Thomas Newell located Igoe and some of his men

²⁷ Winter, *Autobiography*, 293.

²⁸ Coogan, *Man Who Made Ireland*, 182.

²⁹ Edward J. Kelliher, WS 0477, BMH, July 20, 2016.

whilst patrolling for them again with other members appointed by Collins for the task. They followed their adversaries for several blocks, hoping to corner them and finish their assignment, but were instead surprised themselves when their quarry seemingly vanished, only to reappear again as the hunters and not the prey. “I had gone only a few yards,” remembered Newell, “when I felt a hand gripping the collar of my coat. I turned round to see who was holding me. It was Igoe. ‘Come on, Newell’, he said, ‘I want you’. ‘My name is not Newell’, I replied. ‘I know you anyhow’, said Igoe.” Unfortunately for the British the others accompanying Newell were not apprehended, but he himself was taken into custody and held in prison until December 1921.³⁰

By early 1920, the army garrison in Ireland too had become more proactive. Just as the police had started to become more organized under Winter, the army was gradually restructured and fitted to accommodate and train at least one intelligence officer in each area under the supervision of divisions. In their own fashion, military intelligence officers conducted raids and seized useful documents from houses and businesses across the country. Again, just like the police in the initial phase of the conflict, it was not so much a problem of identifying rebels but of obtaining relevant information that would justify holding these individuals in indefinite custody so they could not again resume activities against the British government. “One of the principal duties of military intelligence was to collect information which could be used as legal advice.”³¹ Later, the military authority, upon the requests of Lord French, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief Macready and others, were able to accomplish a great deal more after being given greater power from the government. An extension of the Defence of the Realm Act

³⁰ Thomas Sweeny Newell, WS 0698, BMH, July 20, 2016.

³¹ Hart, *Rebellion*, 21-2.

gave authorities the ability to replace trial by jury with court martial in areas essentially deemed to be more prone to violent activity than others. Later, the military was given a further boost when martial law was declared in some of the worst counties: first in Cork, Limerick, Kerry and Tipperary, and later extended to Waterford and Clare. By December, General Macready reported to the Cabinet that the arrests and “internment camps were going on satisfactorily, although there was rather a shortage of accommodation.”³² In his memoirs Captain R.D. Jeune, serving as an intelligence officer between 1920 and 1921, recalled that by “November [1920], information was coming in well and we were beginning to get on top of the IRA, who were becoming desperate.”³³

By the spring of 1921, the I.R.A.’s G.H.Q. found it increasingly more difficult to trust the population or those with whom members associated themselves. During the year, the Commandant of the Mid-Limerick Brigade wrote back to main headquarters that “In our area it is a pretty common practice for some individuals to associate with the Black and Tans. We suspect them as spies but find it increasingly difficult to get any definitive proof. Kindly say what action we should take concerning them.”³⁴ It seems from these remarks that the I.R.A. felt increasingly vulnerable to British intelligence gathering and the use of British spies and informers. Indeed, the effective raids and arrests by the combined forces of the army and police

³² Kautt, *Ground Truths*, 23-4.

³³ R.D. Jeune, “Chapter 7: Captain R.D. Jeune” in *British Voices from the Irish War of Independence, 1918-1921: The Words of British Servicemen Who Were There*, ed. William Sheehan (Cork: Collins Press, 2005), Location 988. Kindle.

³⁴ Mid-Limerick Brigade Commandant to G.H.Q., 3 March, 1921: Richard Mulcahy Papers, University College Dublin Archives P7/16(10).

resonated in the minds of nationalists well after the British had relinquished control of Ireland.

Speaking of March 1920 in Cork, Tim Herlihy of the 1st Cork Battalion wrote that:

It kept on the move all the time as a flying column should do and yet it could never effect much owing to the way the whole Battalion area was held down by the huge enemy garrison in Ballincollig Barracks which was situated in the centre of the area. In Ballincollig they had an excellent knowledge of the area for miles around and on account of the road net and the big amount of transport they could saturate the countryside with troops in a matter of minutes.”³⁵

Former British officer Lieutenant General A.E. Percival recounted himself that “by the early summer [1921] the IRA were driven into the south west corner of Ireland, and would have been quickly finished. But certain influences were to save them.”³⁶ By “certain influences” Percival surely meant political interference and ignorance of the present situation, as he himself bore witness to this through information obtained from a colleague named Jeffries. After Eámon de Valera was apprehended following his return from a tour of the United States, Jeffries had personally relayed the news to Lloyd George, the latter initially stating that de Valera “on no account be released.”” Soon after, however, “Lloyd George sent orders for de Valera to be released, which was done.”³⁷

During the initial phase of the conflict, the Irish police used the same methods to gather information as had been done in prior decades, and in so doing had achieved many successes despite obstacles such as the assassination of John Redmond and the disbandment of the Irish Secret Service Branch by Birrell. The G Division of the D.M.P. and the Crimes Special Branch

³⁵ Tim Herlihy, WS 0810, BMH, July 20, 2016.

³⁶ Sheehan, *British Voices*, Location 1023, Kindle.

³⁷ *Ibid*, Location 1037.

of the R.I.C. monitored political activity and made great use of their local knowledge and use of informants, with all of the information gathered being carefully recorded and passed on to the various police barracks. By the spring of 1920 Irish police intelligence became more centralized with the appointment of Ormonde Winter as the Chief of Police in Ireland. With his reforms such as the creation Raid Bureau, tasked with capturing documents, a system of photographing arrested and suspected nationalists, and the creation of more specialized units like the Igoe Gang, the British were able to further gain an upper hand, capturing or eliminating many individuals in or assisting the I.R.A., most notably Seán Treacy, Ned Broy and Thomas Newell. Finally, Irish nationalists found themselves to be in an even more dangerous position once the military became more directly involved, establishing intelligence services of their own. All of this combined resulted in mass arrests and the feeling by many in the I.R.A. that they were surrounded and limited in their ability to do much about it or continue operations of their own on a large scale. But as the British intelligence services became more and more successful in their endeavors, they once again encountered obstacles that were to severely counter their efforts.

During the years of the conflict, the police and military found that nearly all of their work and determination came to naught once those arrested faced punishment in the judicial system. As quickly as rebels were found and apprehended, the judicial system, with often quite a bit of pressure from the British administration, released many of these individuals or gave them light sentences. The governing authorities were by certain accounts at a loss as to what action should or could be taken in a situation such as the one they found themselves in in Ireland. Guerilla warfare was something of a new phenomenon to the British Empire up to this point in time, and so the rules of warfare were hard to determine in this context. “Common law did not recognize a

state of rebellion and, thus, did not accept any of its actions as legitimate,³⁸ making it all the more difficult for the police and military forces to arrest and keep confined individuals whom they knew through their own experiences participated in actions against the British state. Even after Irish rebels had been properly identified and found to be guilty of an offence, it still proved increasingly difficult to keep them in custody.

One of the most significant ways in which members of Sinn Féin and rebel organizations exploited the judicial system and the government's leniency was through hunger striking. Not a new tactic, going on hunger strike was quickly adopted after the Rising and continued to play a significant part in undermining the authorities' will to hold people. Once a prisoner or prisoners initiated a hunger strike, news of their actions quickly made its way out of the prisons and into the local and major newspapers, which of course produced great public outcry and garnered a great deal of contempt for the authorities. Not ignorant of public sentiment nor the negative media coverage that these acts of defiance created, Dublin Castle and Westminster consistently sought to alleviate situations by releasing prisoners for a time believed necessary until they could once again be fit to carry out the remainder of their sentences. This was essentially an extension of the 1913 Prisoner (Temporary Discharge of Ill-health) Act, known more commonly as the Cat and Mouse Act.

An example of this tactic can be found in an article written in the *Irish Examiner* in October, 1919. Though the article does not say approximately how many individuals were initially arrested, it can be surmised that the police force had accomplished a great deal as the *Examiner* reported that twenty additional prisoners were in the process of being released from

³⁸ Kautt, *Ground Truths*, 25.

Mountjoy Prison. With crowds gathered outside of the prison walls, the Lord Mayor of Dublin announced to the hundreds of spectators that shortly the remainder of the interned would be released, but under certain conditions. First, those to be released would, in this particular case, return to the prison when their period of freedom expired on 29 October. Second, the Lord Mayor had the power to *extend* the period of discharge if he felt so inclined. Lastly, while free each prisoner was “to abstain from any violation of the law. If he fails to comply with any of the foregoing conditions the prisoner is liable to be arrested and taken back to prison.”³⁹ How the Lord Mayor or the British government thought this would in any way be a sound strategy is difficult to comprehend. Obviously once the prisoners were temporarily discharged they could either go on the run, or at the very least confer with republicans still roaming free and communicate any information they felt was of importance to the nationalist cause. Similar hunger strikes followed in 1920. Hunger strikers were not always released, however as sometimes the government realized the folly in releasing high-profile figures so easily. Terence MacSwiney for one failed in his bid for release. As Ormonde Winter noted in his memoirs: “he [MacSwiney] adopted the hitherto successful expedient of going on hunger strike; but on this occasion, in spite of urgent appeals for his release which were vigorously resisted by the Chief of Police on the grounds that it would seriously undermine the morale of the R.I.C., the Government stood firm.”⁴⁰ Lord French was likewise greatly perturbed and angered by the number of prisoners being released:

The frequent decisions to release prisoners were vehemently opposed by the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland John French. Speaking to the Cabinet in 1920, French asserted that if the government was not yet prepared to make some kind of truce with the nationalists in the near future, then it would be more effective to “put the struggle on a war basis, as

³⁹ “Mountjoy Prisoners: Twenty More Released.” *Irish Examiner*, October 20, 1919.

⁴⁰ Winter, *Autobiography*, 292.

had been done in the Boer War when the rebels were seized and put into concentration camps.” Such provisions were not granted at the time, and French was assured by the Lord Mayor of Dublin that “not five percent of the Irish people wanted a Republic and that what was really wanted was Colonial Home Rule for the whole of Ireland.”⁴¹

The Lord Mayor’s statement indeed seemed to reflect at least some of the sentiments shared by many members of the coalition government.

No doubt fear of public opinion played a significant role on the Liberal government’s failure to take more decisive action against the growing rebellion, which, in turn, deprived the R.I.C. and D.M.P. of their abilities to stay on top of their adversaries. The British administration could not stand idly by and let Sinn Fein and the I.R.A impose their will over all of Ireland, yet they equally could not be seen by the Irish people or the world at large as being too heavy handed or taking too violent an approach to the situation at hand, although it can be argued the administration had already tarnished its reputation with the deployment of “Black and Tans” in Ireland beginning in January 1920.⁴² A substantial contingent of the army had, as stated earlier, been garrisoned in Ireland for some time before and during the fighting, but along with the perceived need by the Liberals to not be on a war footing, even some Conservatives believed it would do more harm than good to utilize them at the present time in an offensive capacity. Sir Edward Carson, then Leader of the Opposition, believed that the men consisting the garrison in Ireland were too inexperienced to give any real support to the law enforcement agencies. Thus, despite General Macready’s speech that the Irish situation was becoming increasingly harder to

⁴¹ Cabinet Conclusions. Situation in Ireland. 26 April, 1920. CAB 23/21.

⁴² Marie Coleman, *The Irish Revolution, 1916-1923* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2014), 70.

deal with, the Cabinet was inclined to conclude at this point in time that further military intervention would not be the best course of action.

The army officers at present “were young” and until more veteran officers could be obtained “the military should not themselves attempt to be the controlling forces, but should rather be present to support the police force in the discharge of their duties.”⁴³ Therefore, the government produced “a scheme for raising a Special Emergency Gendarmerie, which would become a branch of the Royal Irish Constabulary.”⁴⁴ Going further still, Carson expressed his belief that arrests made by the authorities should be “as few as possible, unless the prisoners could be tried, and that the number of raids should be restricted.” The decision to bring in these ex-servicemen would prove to be a point of contention between the army and civil authority, as well as a great public relations and strategic failure as the war progressed. As noted in the previous chapter, the Black and Tans and also the Auxiliaries have since their time been lambasted and heavily criticized for the part they played in wanton destruction of private and public property, most notably the burning of the commercial district in Cork on 12 December 1920,⁴⁵ and the killing of civilians during reprisals. While many of these individuals, it has been argued, were not as rash or prone to acts of violence as they have so often been pictured, they were most definitely some of the most hated by the general Irish public and ardent nationalists alike. On many occasions these recruits would advertise what they were capable of doing to a person no matter if there was only trace evidence of anti-British sentiment or apparent

⁴³ Cabinet Conclusions. Situation in Ireland. 26 April 1920. CAB 23/21. NAUK. Pg.60.

⁴⁴ Cabinet Conclusions. Situation in Ireland. 19 May 1920. NAUK. Pg. 15.

⁴⁵ Leeson. *Black and Tans*, 418.

collaboration found regarding that. To cite one example, in Carrickmacross, county Monaghan, the Black and Tans posted a proclamation which read:

Whereas Cowardly (sic) assassins of the Sinn Féin Organisation are continually murdering royal servants of the Crown, and owing to a Military Sergeant being assaulted in Carrickmacross last Sunday night, we, the Black and Tans of this area, warn the inhabitants of Carrickmacross not to appear in the streets with their hands in their pockets or in numbers exceeding two. If found in gateways they will be instantly shot.⁴⁶

Again, in light of the hostile and uncertain surroundings in which they found themselves, orders and threats such as these most likely gave some of these men some kind of sense of security aside from just a sheer thirst for revenge or retribution. If the people could be cowed into silence and submission then there would be less support for the enemy and less seemingly mischievous activity from the people themselves. As beneficial as these crude tactics may have seemed to these ex-servicemen, they were detrimental to the police forces and the military. As stated earlier, the R.I.C and D.M.P., before the appointment and reorganization of the police forces by Ormonde Winter, collected information they used to find and arrest largely through word of mouth, whether that entailed a constable conversing directly with citizens, or citizens relaying bits of intelligence back to police headquarters. With this type of information gathering becoming harder to come by as time wore on, the Black and Tans' actions had overwhelmingly negative effects on a system that for quite some time contributed to the apprehension of I.R.A. members and those closely linked with other nationalist organizations. Not only did these new recruits deter Irish citizens from aiding the British authorities or associating with them, but also created more work that was time-consuming and counterproductive. On one occasion, in February 1921, a number of Black and Tan's attacked and killed a man in Dunlavin, County

⁴⁶ P.V. Hoey, WS 0530, BMH, July 20, 2016.

Wicklow. The murdered man, George Dixon, was not suspected of any nationalist activity of collusion with the I.R.A. In fact he was on good terms with both the regular R.I.C. and the new recruits. His violent death, according to the county inspector and quoted in D.M. Leeson's work, "aroused intense feeling for a time in Dunlavin neighbourhood (sic) against the so-called 'Black and Tans' on the part of the loyal & Unionist Section, especially as Mr (sic) Dixon & his family had been very kind to the police." Actions like these thus soured public opinion for the authorities and added extra legal work, as one of the perpetrators later faced a lengthy trial and was eventually hanged.⁴⁷

The civil servant Thomas Jones wrote that with the recruitment of these men, "brutality, arson and murder became commonplace."⁴⁸ So too would this belief that arrests and raids should be limited in practice. From the point of view of many Liberals as well as some Conservatives, the military authority should not take direct action in the fighting, but should be left to the police. Yet according to those such as Edward Carson, the police should exercise caution when performing their duties so as not to cause any further agitation, even though it was arrests and raids that produced the most useful intelligence to Crown forces.

The recruitment and subsequent deployment of the Black and Tans not only hurt efforts of police, but also the efforts of the army, not to mention the army's already growing frustration with the regular police. Nearly since the conflict first began in earnest, military intelligence officers as well as their commanding officers took a dim view of police intelligence-gathering methods and the seemingly reluctant attitude the latter had in forwarding said intelligence to

⁴⁷ Leeson, *Black and Tans*, 2834-38.

⁴⁸ Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, 118.

those seeking the same goals or outcomes. In large part it seems that the way in which the police collected their information that was the most repugnant to the army, for it was far more used to, especially by this point in time, well documented facts and figures that could be quickly copied and utilized by multiple people at the same time and could be cataloged into what they believed was a more efficient system. Later, in the view of army G.H.Q., that during the conflict “the local R.I.C. could give little reliable information about such persons beyond a statement that so and so was a ‘bad boy’ or ‘bad article’. The police lists were out of date and to them every Sinn Fein club was a battalion.”⁴⁹ With the deployment of reinforcements for the police in 1920, this animosity only grew worse. In a letter to the Cabinet, General Macready wrote:

Lately the Royal Irish Constabulary has been reinforced by recruits from England, usually ex-soldiers known by the sobriquet of “Black & Tans- who on account of their Uniform are often mistaken by the populace for soldiers. It is not for me to criticize the methods employed by the Police for keeping order, but in certain parts of the country this is attained by promiscuous firing, with the object, presumably, of keeping the people off the streets, and I am informed that such methods are necessary and effective. Retaliatory measures are often indulged in, especially by the “Black & Tan” contingent, when incensed by the murders of their comrades. I mention these facts merely to illustrate the atmosphere in which the young soldiers who compose the Army to-day are called upon to serve.⁵⁰

What was really wanted and needed by those such as General Macready was a declaration of martial law across Ireland, or, at the very least, the power to implement martial law in any county or area that was seen to warrant martial law. Sharing this opinion too was Major-General Jeudwine, who in May 1920, after consulting with his fellow officers stationed across Ireland, was “of the opinion that Martial Law should be proclaimed throughout Ireland; it

⁴⁹Hart, *The Final Reports*, 19.

⁵⁰ W.H. Kautt, *Ground Truths*, 228.

can be intensified in defined areas, as and when desirable.”⁵¹ As noted earlier, martial law was indeed implemented in parts of Ireland such as Cork, Waterford and Clare, but only after much insistence by the military authorities in Ireland and after outrages committed by the I.R.A that were seen as sufficiently heinous as to justify martial law. Even when, as stated earlier, a group of I.R.A. men including Dan Breen ambushed and tried unsuccessfully to assassinate Lord French, Lloyd George and the majority of his administration were hesitant to impose such extreme measures. Instead, the Defence of the Realm Act was “pushed to its limits.”⁵² Army G.H.Q. in reference to this event, later wrote that:

Briefly, the policy was to transfer to the Competent Military Authority the powers, previously vested in the police authorities and magistrates, of instituting and organizing action against the perpetrators of outrage and the organizers of lawlessness, and to deport and intern them under DRR 14B such persons on a warrant signed by the Chief Secretary of Ireland. Secondly, the Competent Military Authority was to be empowered to search individuals and buildings for arms, explosives, and seditious literature.⁵³

Measures such as these did greatly increase the army’s efforts in combating the I.R.A and weakening the nationalist position, but it was not enough to bring the I.R.A to surrender or to force an earlier negotiation more favorable to the British side. The rebellion in Ireland was, as succinctly put by Lloyd George, “a policeman’s job.” Far from being a total intelligence disaster, both the civil authority and the army proved to be quite adept in their efforts to locate and apprehend those who were actively seeking to undermine and overthrow the British government of Ireland. From the start, the R.I.C. and the D.M.P. were, despite increasing pressure from the nationalists and problems of resignation, able to stay on top of their adversaries through the use

⁵¹ Ibid, 231.

⁵² Townshend, *British Campaign in Ireland*, 49.

⁵³ Kautt, *Ground Truths*, 31.

of human intelligence and, later, the implementation of document exploitation, which greatly aided in identification. The military forces in Ireland, too, under the circumstances in which they found themselves, were able to make great strides in the capture and elimination of their enemies. However, due to political pressure, a great many of their achievements, most importantly in this case arrests, were undermined, and many of those known to be active members of the nationalist cause were forced to be let go from whence they continued their activities against Great Britain and the Irish administration. In believing that a more moderate approach to the Irish situation would result in a more desirable outcome, Lloyd George and his coalition government ultimately refused to implement a concrete plan that would aid in the indefinite holding of known Sinn Féin politicians and I.R.A. combatants. The police forces and the military were not unified and thus left to operate in separate spheres. This, from nearly the beginning, created animosity and frustration between the two groups, which, if the government had taken a more definite approach, would have been eliminated and a more centralized plan of action to bring the Irish nationalists to British justice would have been far more successful than the eventual outcome.

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