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**BRITISH FORCES AND IRISH FREEDOM:
ANGLO-IRISH DEFENCE RELATIONS 1922-1931**

by

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* Text refers to former title: The Rt. Hon Julian Amery, M.P.

INTRODUCTION

Anglo-Free State relations between the wars still awaits a comprehensive study ... This is in part a reflection of the larger failure of British historians to work on Anglo-Irish history ... the Right has been ill at ease dealing with Britain's greatest failure, whilst the Left has found tropical climes more suited for the cultivation of its moral superiority.¹

When R.F.Holland made this apposite comment, just over a decade ago, he may have been adding to the very problems he identified. Writing within the context of the 'Commonwealth Alliance', he was joining a distinguished list of British and Irish historians who have sought to filter inter-war Anglo-Free State relations through the mesh of Empire-Commonwealth development. Beginning with A. Berriedale Keith in the 1920s, this usage continued in either direct or indirect form (by way of particular institutions of Commonwealth) from the 1930s to the 1970s through the works of W.K. Hancock, Nicholas Mansergh and D.W. Harkness, and was still finding favour with Brendan Sexton's study of the Irish Governor-Generalship system in the late 1980s.² But herein a contradiction has developed: cumulative study of the unnatural origins and performance of the Free State as a Dominion has moved beyond questions of function to ask whether the Free State was in fact ever a Dominion at all.³ As such, there seems ever more need to step back from inter-Commonwealth study and refocus on the precise nature of the Free State's central relationship with Britain in this period.

It is of course acknowledged that outwith the established zones of internal Irish and Empire-Imperial study there is no home or forum for one of the most enduring quandaries of modern European history. Even if it is accepted that 'pure' Anglo-Irish history did not end in 1922, the weight of research based on the ten years prior, as against the ten years subsequent, suggests an easy acceptance, on both sides of the Irish Sea, and Atlantic, of the absolute value changes in that relationship. Studies covering the transition to independence, such as those of Joseph M. Curran and Sheila Lawlor⁴, have taken only tentative steps beyond 1922, and may indeed have epitomised an approach that subsequent Irish studies have done little to dispel; in the 1980s, major overviews by R.F. Foster and J.J. Lee have been notably reluctant to evaluate the quality of that new found freedom with continuing reference to Ireland's giant neighbour. Though Foster, and others, have noted that the main aim of the Free State in the 1920s was 'self-definition against Britain', the point is the extent to which Britain was willing to allow the same.⁵

There has then been little impetus for direct Anglo-Free State inter-war study, and although the tide has begun to turn since the mid-1980's, notably through the achievements of Paul Canning, Deidre McMahon and, shortly before his death, Nicholas Mansergh⁶, it is probable that we are still a long way short of being able to produce a comprehensive and coherent review of the period. Apart from the crucial Anglo/Irish-Anglo/Commonwealth dichotomy, there remains the political chasm dividing the Cosgrave years of the 1920s from those of de Valera's 1930s; indeed the overwhelming preoccupation with post-1931 confrontations has often, as in the case of McMahon's fine study, taken as its contrasting starting point the supposedly

compliant 'pro-Treaty' years of 1922-31. It is hard to bridge this gulf when the little direct work on these earlier years, mostly concentrating on the two fundamental issues of Boundary and financial settlement, has tended not to question this divide. Although Irish historians have turned an increasingly sympathetic eye on the internal politics and problems of these early years, the apathetic external image, in contrast to the later period, has been persistent.

Nowhere has this negativity been more apparent than on the, also vital, topic of defence relations. For a subject that has been given more than adequate attention in terms of the 1921 Treaty negotiations and the Treaty Ports issue of the 1930s, the period in between has had little intensive coverage. In this regard the negative response of W.K.Hancock in 1937, stating that Cosgrave did not bother to question British defence imperatives, was still being held some fifty years later by Paul Canning.⁷ Thus an enduring and important image has emerged of defence relations re-enforcing the above divide, an image that has had to stand for the lack of new research. This does not mean that the image is necessarily an entirely false one, but it does mean that many of the supposed novelties of the de Valera years have been built on largely unknown foundations.

The Treaty Ports issue is also vital to this thesis, but then so are other defence related matters which had an impact specific to the 1920s. In other words, the human and political context of how both countries, but the Irish government in particular, coped with the immediate legacy of centuries of armed occupation, with the recent 1916-21 conflict, and with the smaller scale continuity of British occupation, was bound to cast

old shadows over a new relationship. But how big were these shadows? It was on the basis of placing some detailed flesh on the skeleton of known (and unknown) policies and events that this thesis took shape. Frustrations and resentments could take necessarily quieter forms than those which characterised the 1930s, and in the end be no less significant.

If the first objective is then to make solid the continuity of defence affairs, it is appropriate to begin with a brief evaluation of the Treaty defence negotiations before taking a close look at British operations in the South in 1922 - the year when a reluctant Cosgrave was to inherit a situation where British forces were close to the development of civil war. Despite our growing knowledge of Britain's part in the progress of that war, there is still a general perception that its forces became peripheral to events after the Truce of July 1921, and that its Army was, and had been, the only British Service involved in the struggle against armed republicanism. This is simply not the case, and it is to be wondered whether the proper absorption of Irish historians with the internal dynamics of the period, together with the authoritative quality of Charles Townshend's history of the 1919-21 British campaign, have not produced inhibitions to wider inquiry.⁸ In any event, as the Admiralty was to play a central part in later defence relations it seems right to introduce, for the first time, the Royal Navy's important role in the events of 1922. The point here is to establish that the actions and perceptions of both Services were to have repercussions for later attitudes.

After these chapters, the following two aim to look at the cumulative legacy of British involvement and how both countries adjusted to the many unresolved questions thrown up by the Treaty and the unplanned contingencies of 1922. Retaining the theme that neither country could escape the past, nor trust to the future, chapter six returns to the physical and political impact made by the continuing presence of British forces in and around the three Treaty Ports, and along and across the Border. The final two chapters explore how all these factors helped determine the conditions for, and consequences of, one of the most damaging episodes of the later 1920s - the complete failure of the joint coastal defence review scheduled for December 1926. In all, the cumulative emphasis on the politics of defence may illustrate what it was to be a small aspiring country that had little choice but to accept Britain's version of what was an inevitably close relationship, and to endure what Britain claimed as the benign strategic necessity of continued occupation.

As such, this study may also be taken as an example of the contentious subject of British inter-war Imperialism, and of the 'imperial mind'; a collective condition of unthinking superiority, often described if not so named.⁹ Given the traditional tensions between the two countries, it follows that this study will challenge the sometimes awkward acceptance that the Free State did enjoy full Dominion status and practice, excepting the matter of defence: defence is not an abstract or marginal issue; it lies at the core of any aspiring country's identity and perception of freedom. By the same token this challenge is extended to the alternative idea that, having been granted disguised republican discretions, the Free State was tied to Imperial demands in name only.¹⁰ Looking at the 1920s, at a time when the Empire did not have

constitutional definition, the question of status, as posed by defence relations, will, in final discussion, be traced back to where this thesis begins - at the nature of the Treaty itself. This is especially relevant if it can be shown, in a way that Ireland's disjointed and disputed Commonwealth participation history cannot, that there was a direct bond of dissent and 'external association' grievance linking the Cosgrave and de Valera years.

While this is far from being a comprehensive review of the inter-war period, nor yet a complete review of the neglected Cosgrave years, it does go to the heart of Anglo-Free State relations and may help towards making such a comprehensive study a feasible proposition. It is not suggested that the inter-Commonwealth perspective can be dispensed with, only that we need first to find out far more about that unique and basic association. It has been a stimulating challenge to try to view this, where possible, through Irish eyes, but it is hoped that a balanced and empathic view of conflicting Imperial concerns has also been achieved; the one is so often reflected in the other.

Finally, the conscious omissions in this study have to be declared. It is fully realised that while there was a general cross-party unity on Irish policy in Britain, the views of Sinn Fein, Fianna Fail and other republican bodies would offer a different slant to this largely inter-governmental study. It may be significant that little organised republican comment on British defence measures has been found for this period, but the point has anyway been to discover just how far the Cosgrave governments did abandon their earlier roots. Even then it has been difficult to trace archive defence

material specific to the 1929-31 period, a situation which can be explained partly in terms of the terminal events of the crucial 1924-28 period (detailed here), and partly in terms of the known lack of defence initiatives by the Labour and National governments of 1929-31.

And yet, while these might be seen as self-evident omissions, that of the Ulster dimension certainly needs explanation, if not excuse. On one level the Free State could hardly ignore the position of the North, and it is hoped that some new and intriguing insights into cross-Border defence relations have been touched on. On another level, however, an emphatic point is that a re-emergent nation could have more than enough British related defence problems to contend with in the South, without continuous reference to a distinct Northern situation it could do little, directly, to affect. Contentious though the politics may have been, the Free State was an entity in itself. It is quite certain that Northern Ireland archives could shed further light on several aspects of this thesis, but that is for future study and consideration; in the interim enough challenges are contained in this study of a much neglected period and topic.

CHAPTER 1 : BACKGROUND - DEFENCE AND THE TREATY

As in the case of the Dominions in 1914, our peril will be her danger,
our fears will be her anxieties, our victories will be her joy.

Lloyd George on the Treaty - House
of Commons, 14th December 1921.¹

The London negotiations which led to the signing of the December 1921 Treaty (more properly the Articles of Agreement for a Treaty) between 'Great Britain and Ireland' formed one of the great political dramas of the twentieth century. The subject of defence, however, though looked at in some detail, has been held by most historians to have played only a minor part in that two month drama. In comparison with passions aroused by the abstract concepts of the Crown and 'essential unity' of Ireland, it has even been held that the Irish conceded Britain's strategic wants 'without much argument' or real concern²; a reflection, no doubt, on the Irish having to pay heed to Britain's early warning that this question was beyond negotiation³. According to Lord Longford's (then Frank Pakenham) classic account of the talks, this particular issue was so basic and one-sided that within a couple of weeks of their arrival in London the Irish delegates had surrendered the argument; by the end of October: 'Britain had won on Defence'.⁴ In all, it seems that little had changed from the position of July 1921, when London had first informed Sinn Fein of its basic proposals for peace negotiations; these had included (beside the implied removal of all armed troops from the South - at that time amounting to over 50,000 men) the Admiralty's continuing control of all coastal and naval defence.⁵

But within this framework of events lies a more intricate story, and one which illustrates, as perhaps no other Treaty topic could, just how far the Irish were forced to march between expectation and achievement. No matter how self-evident it might seem that Britain's defence proposals did not imply deliberate subjection and exclusion from Dominion practice, the fact remains that the Irish delegates arrived in London knowing that if they accepted them they would lose even the pretence of a desired 'external association'.⁶ According to Nicholas Mansergh, it was telling that at the beginning of the talks the Irish were arguing generally within the scope of British proposals, rather than their own counter-points, and that by time they had formulated coherent 'external association' responses the British could claim that it was too late to backtrack. Arguably, however, defence was the one vital exception to this rule, vital in the sense that the force of Irish visions on neutrality contained its own clarity, and may have forewarned the British side of what to expect of later discussions.⁷

That the Irish should claim that an international and/or Commonwealth guarantee of neutrality or 'integrity' would meet British requirements, and preclude the need for bases and coastal control, did indeed indicate that what was being sought was a 'republic within the Empire' - to Britain a totally unacceptable concept.⁸ But to Irish eyes, and particularly to those of the much maligned Erskine Childers, there was much to defend in this stance: if, as he believed, simple geographic distance and historical sentiment would make it difficult for Britain to respect Dominion independence, then it was logical to assume that the granting of harbours and coastal waters would epitomise and enlarge the problem. Nor was it the case that the

supposedly 'fanatical' Childers held only the tentative support of his more moderate colleagues; to begin with he was more than ably supported on the question of neutrality by Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins, and the sequence of events in London suggests that it was only the agreement to remove defence matters to a sub-conference committee that prevented an early breakdown on principle. In this committee it was notable that Collins supported Childers to the extent that Churchill and Lord Beatty were soon forced to direct talks back to the main conference; by mid-October Churchill believed that the *joint* Irish stance comprised a direct rejection of Imperial defence interests.⁹

This position could not, of course, last. Britain's dominance in negotiation could not be denied, particularly when her demands had domestic and international credibility and Ireland's own wider security was at stake. And yet the received idea of Irish indifference probably stems more from the speed of their about-turn than the position finally agreed. It is true that in less than two weeks the Irish moved from a position of almost total obstruction to one of almost complete capitulation, but in the interim they did offer some coherent and consistent resistance. By the end of October they had prepared a fallback solution, by which the British could have 'under licence' from the Irish government all coastal facilities 'agreed to be necessary', this pending the Free State's ability to take responsibility for the same. It seems that Childers supported this compromise, and in essence it did still protect the principle of external association by claiming, at least, ultimate control over British naval and military activities. It also provided a realistic framework for further negotiation, in that it observed Dominion practice and answered Britain's technical demands.¹⁰

The essential point, however, was that this offer could not meet Britain's political demands, and in the final days of October the full weight of Imperial divide-and-rule experience was brought to bear on defence.¹¹ As in other areas of the talks, the breakthrough came when Griffith was consulted in private (in this instance by Lloyd George himself), and where Griffith led the other principal and moderate, Collins, soon followed. It was during this period that Childers began to despair that the two senior men were conceding unconditional control, a defiance that then left him isolated and which has produced little subsequent sympathy from historians.¹² But a question that has never been raised of this time is the extent to which the other delegates, and even de Valera himself, ever fully appreciated Britain's clinical separation of coastal defence from coast defences - the one to be covered by Article 6 of the proposed Treaty, the other by Article 7 (see Appendix 1). Even as late as the 3rd December, when the full Dail Cabinet met to consider its final position, it was thought that the latter could also be brought within a comprehensive five year transfer, instead of the simple ten year 'review' of the former that was actually on offer. As the only military and strategic expert on the Irish side, Childers must have known that this was a forlorn task and that the damage was already done.¹³

And so it proved: on their return to London, for what was to be the final session of talks, the Irish team did attempt to rescue some partial claim to sovereignty from the defence measures, but in the event Britain would grant only details. It was significant that Collins, in private session with Lloyd George, indicated that agreement could be reached if Britain conceded that *all* coastal defence would be transferred in the stated ten years. The latter dismissed this, although it is again far from clear that Collins

accepted that the proposed Articles 6 and 7 were not just sub-divisions of a negotiable whole. His official report on this private discussion notes that he moved on to insist on a definition of 'care and maintenance parties' (to be retained at named harbour defences), but Collins does not specify that with this the two had moved to a separate subject entirely. Nevertheless, the urgency with which Lloyd George pursued Collins's demand for tighter definitions suggests that the British side still feared that their counterparts might rebel on both Articles.¹⁴

Indeed, given the intensity of the 5th December, when so many last minute dramas were played out over the status of the North and the Oath of Allegiance, the time devoted to re-arguing defence issues was both remarkable and telling. According to the Irish records, both sides 'argued at great length' over Irish concerns (which were strangely prophetic) that as the terms stood the promised coastal defence review 'might never be held if the British did not wish to consider the subject.' At this the two sides 'went over all the arguments again', with Churchill expressing the blunt opinion that the Irish would never be allowed a navy. All this referred to Article 6, but once again the key question is whether, in the heat of argument, the British made clear, or the Irish understood, that Article 7 did not overlap. It seems not: the Irish records state that when the British finally conceded a five year review (instead of ten), Churchill refused to extend this to the facilities required in wartime; in other words, it was believed that in accepting this amended coastal review date the named peacetime defences in the first part of Article 7 might be included.¹⁵

That final argument did range over both Articles, and British peacetime requirements, is known; Churchill and Lord Beatty had never tried to explain, at least to the satisfaction of Childers and Collins, why the Admiralty needed to hold both Queenstown and Berehaven in the south west, but a last plea that the former be removed from the Treaty list was refused.¹⁶ Irish objection was rational, given that Haulbowline naval dockyard at Queenstown had already been declared redundant, but perhaps the real point is that too much emphasis can be placed on the strategic objectivity of British defence demands. It would not have been lost on either side that Queenstown formed the impressive gateway to the South's second city, and that it was the first sighting that many international visitors and tourists beheld of Ireland. As such, it might have been that the real argument revolved around whether it was to remain a prestige symbol of Empire, or an equally imposing symbol of Irish independence.¹⁷

In all, by the time the Irish delegates had signed the Treaty, in the early hours of 6th December, the defence arrangements must have been a bitter, if not in themselves politically fatal, pill to swallow. From a starting point where it was thought that a guaranteed neutrality was feasible, it ended with Britain retaining, in large measure, the status quo. Ranged against some of the most skilled and experienced political tacticians in modern Imperial history, the outcome was never really in doubt; Birkenhead had long warned the Irish side that his country would not concede that an independent Ireland could escape an Imperial war, and the Treaty had to reflect this concern.¹⁸ In the circumstances, it is interesting that some recent historians, notably Paul Canning, should hold that Irish indifference led to better terms being

overlooked.¹⁹ This implies a level of British flexibility and Irish resignation that is hard to detect, either before, during, or after the negotiations. During the Dail Treaty debates in December 1921, even the most ardent pro-Treaty supporters doubted the defence terms, as was made plain when Kevin O'Higgins was attacked by Childers: the former could only beseech Childers to remember that even he, as a military expert, had been unable to advise on how to 'break' the British military might that bound them. Interestingly, whereas the Pro-Treaty camp alone accepted, albeit reluctantly, the potential longer-term benefits of the general agreement, on defence there appears to have been an embarrassed consensus that the argument with Britain had been merely deferred. Childers, with his extreme 'logical correctitude', alone refused to believe that this was the case, but it remained to be seen whether the man who best understood the imperial mind was in fact correct.²⁰

.....

In Britain generally, the signing of the Treaty was greeted with a relief bordering on euphoria; it was seen that Lloyd George, the 'Welsh Wizard', had pulled off his greatest feat so far - peace with country still loyal to Crown and Empire, and with the essential security of Britain and Northern Ireland preserved. Only Whitehall knew what a frenetic thing it had been at the last, and that 'peace' had been obtained only by an ultimatum of immediate war. In these circumstances, it was not surprising that a show of good faith was urgently required, and when General Macready, G.O.C. in C. Ireland, returned to London on the 6th December he found the subject of troop withdrawals already under discussion.²¹ Churchill, in particular, wanted

all the troops home 'as quickly as convenient', noting: 'We should even make a parade of this, and in particular remove all troops from Dublin at the earliest'²². Doubtless it was going to be quite a show, and, even as these words were written, moves were afoot to give them effect; by mid-January the battalions were leaving the South as fast as transport and home reception depots could be arranged.²³

But there was something missing in the daily press reports on troop departures; instead of pomp and celebration there was more a sense of haste and tribulation. By the beginning of February there were those in London who, having trusted the celebration of settlement, began to ask why the rush of returning troops were being greeted 'without one word of recognition of their services'.²⁴ It was telling that such a question could be asked at a time when the political news from Dublin could no longer be disguised, but the reality was that display was a provocative luxury when the Treaty had, almost from the moment of signing, threatened to split Sinn Fein and the I.R.A. down the middle. It was perhaps implicit in London's reactions, and in Churchill's above words, that a rapid troop evacuation might be the best way to 'buy' complete acceptance of the Treaty in Dublin, but by the beginning of February it was clear that the gamble had failed. There was as yet no indication that the military truce of July 1921 was about to be broken, and yet by the same token the hopeless division of both the Dail and Dail Cabinet promised a political fragmentation that made further troop withdrawals a liability.²⁵

That liability was only furthered by the associated post-Treaty violence that had erupted in Belfast and on the Border. With pressure being applied by the Irish

Unionist Alliance, Bonar Law and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (C.I.G.S.), Sir Henry Wilson, it seemed that the situation in the North was beginning to dictate a mood that evacuation had gone too far too soon. But serious though this situation was, it can be argued that concern for the North was to be a deciding factor only insofar as it reflected on the loyalty and stability of the newly formed Provisional Government; the Treaty was all, and its fate lay in Dublin, not Belfast. If removing the troops could not buy trust and stability, then they would have to stay put and help enforce the Treaty.²⁶

Thus by the beginning of February the basic tenet of the Treaty's defence terms was being undermined by force of circumstance. There was already enough evidence to suggest that while the Treaty might define the future relationship between Britain and Ireland, it would not necessarily define the future of Ireland itself; in other words, and despite possible British delusions to the contrary, the much disputed articles and clauses could not in themselves create a Dominion. This was especially so when a vital element of the Treaty - defence - had set out to preclude that status and obscure one of the first expressions of sovereignty that any newly independent country seeks. The coming months and years were going to test whether this was a tenable position.

CHAPTER 2 : THE BRITISH ARMY IN THE SOUTH - 1922

1. Macroom and the Road to Dublin.

Then what are our troops in the 26 counties for? Are they there at the request of Mr Collins? If so will the Government say so? Will Mr. Collins say so? If they are not, why are they there?

Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson:
Commons debate, May 1922.¹

When troop withdrawals from the South were suspended, in mid-February, the 'sole' reason, as given by Churchill, was the deteriorating situation on the Border.² Certainly there was merit to this claim, although by this time no amount of specific justification was going to hide the fact that the real problem was the Imperial government's all too eager faith in the Treaty itself. Only days before the suspension was announced, Lord Cecil had led a commanding Commons attack against the received idea that the newly nominated Provisional Government in Dublin had been invested with true authority; he appreciated that the increasing strife was making the Provisional Government's position 'almost intolerable', but the point was made that it was 'in law, nothing but a series of private individuals who were carrying out perfectly unsanctioned acts.' The game was up: forced into helpless agreement with this argument, Churchill had then to demonstrate that he still accepted full Imperial responsibility for the South. It seemed that until the Irish Free State (Agreement) Act was ratified the troops were going to have to stay, regardless of the situation in the North. Furthermore, events were to show that Churchill was under no illusion that

this might be just a temporary halt.³

The actual level of trust that the Imperial government still placed in its own creation can be judged by the Provisional Government's complaint that it was not notified of the evacuation halt until '24 hours after it was a fait accompli.' British Army G.H.Q. in Dublin was left in no doubt that the Irish believed the suspension to be 'the biggest blow struck at their prestige', and yet it was notable that Michael Collins, much to London's surprise, did not make an official protest.⁴ There was, however, good reason to be cautious: the pro-Treaty Dublin establishment had become alarmed at the pace of the evacuation, and the political imperative for the British to go was creating added social and economic distress in many areas. In mid-January, for example, a petition had been received which detailed the future plight of an estimated 3,000 people in the area of the Curragh (garrisoned since 1855) whose livelihoods were dependent upon the garrison.⁵

It seemed, however, that the good people of the Curragh were due a reprieve. The timing of the evacuation suspension had also to take account of the disposition of General Macready's (G.O.C.in C.) forces in the South: when announced, Stage 1 of the two part evacuation plan - withdrawal from outlying areas to the main military centres of Cork, the Curragh and Dublin - was nearing completion, and consolidation would present few problems. That consolidation at these three strategic centres was the immediate object, was made clear at a meeting of the Provisional Government of Ireland Committee (P.G.I.- Cabinet Sub-Committee) at the end of February, when Churchill overruled General Macready's appeal that the planned Easter target for

complete withdrawal be kept on line. It was agreed that any further movement would depend on Michael Collins's personal assurances in interview with Churchill.⁶

This meeting was not about to take place, even though it was to become obvious that the more Collins lost control of events, the more he would have to identify with Churchill's own doubts. In the early spring of 1922 it was the pivotal importance of Limerick that threatened to lock pro and anti-Treaty forces in immediate civil war, and when Macready pulled out his remaining 'two weak battalions' from there, at the end of March, he was to incur the wrath of both men for destabilising the position. It was no secret that Macready and the War Office resented the open ended nature of the suspension order, but the ability of politicians to bend their own directives now threatened a serious row. Indeed, had Churchill not refrained from sending a prepared letter to Macready, in which he noted that 'the wish of the Provisional Government to delay the evacuation of Limerick should have been brought to the notice of the Cabinet before it was decisively over-ruled', then a confrontation may have been inevitable.⁷

Apart from having nothing to gain by undermining Macready's position, the reason why Churchill had to tread carefully can be understood in terms of the resources actually available to the former. There were only 15 battalions left in the South - 4 based at the Curragh, 6 at Dublin and 5 at Cork - and of these several, since the Truce of July 1921, had been reduced to less than 50 per cent of establishment strength because of detachments to other theatres of Empire security. In short, Macready could afford to consolidate, but otherwise had no room to manoeuvre.⁸

Since the evacuation suspension, the concern for Northern Ireland's security had seen General Cameron (G.O.C.- Northern Ireland) increase his forces from 13 to 16 battalions (and shortly to a total of 23), but while Macready retained a nominal policy control over these forces, they were of little immediate benefit to his predicament in the South.⁹ The essential point, however, was that in extricating the last two isolated battalions from Limerick, Stage 1 of the overall withdrawal plan was at last complete, as per the standing P.G.I. Committee directive, and a coherent and defensible deployment attained.

As such, when on the 4th April Macready confronted Collins and General Eoin O'Duffy, then Deputy Chief of Staff, with the news that British troops were likely to stay put, he could do so with relative confidence. Already alarmed at the number of evacuated barracks in the hands of anti-Treaty forces, British suspicions could only have been strengthened as Collins again took a defensive posture, admitting that he did not yet have the capacity to take over the Cork barracks; it was noted, in particular, that the evacuation of the main Cork barrack at Ballincollig might have to wait until after the promised general election.¹⁰ But unknown to Collins, events in London were about to overtake even his own concerns: dating also from early April was the first meeting of the newly formed Irish Sub-Committee of the C.I.D., whose task was to detail economic and military contingencies should Collins falter and a Republic be declared. The central theme was to occupy and secure the principal ports of the South and create an economic stranglehold, and in this regard Dublin and Cork would have held priority.¹¹ Clearly then, the short term coherence of staying put in Cork, the Curragh and Dublin, was being enhanced by a middle to, perhaps, long

term strategic aim.

Everything was pointing in one direction, and it was with an air of finality that Churchill, on the 17th April, advised Alfred 'Andy' Cope, the British Assistant Under-Secretary in Dublin: 'We shall certainly not be able to withdraw our troops from their present positions until we know that the Irish people are going to stand by the Treaty'.¹² As late as the 10th May, Austen Chamberlain, as Leader of the House (and acting P.M.), was claiming it was 'desirable' that troops should stay in Cork and Dublin, and the informed Sir Henry Wilson was baiting the government front bench to admit the strategic reasons for holding these ports.¹³ And yet, within a week of Chamberlain's remark, the British had cleared out of Cork, were packing up at the Curragh, and beginning to concentrate all remaining troops behind the 'Pale' in Dublin; the articulate planning of many weeks had been overturned in just a few days.

Previously, the cause and significance of this sudden policy change has been subsumed within an understanding that the direction of troop withdrawals was somehow progressive and inevitable, given that the British were genuinely looking for the opportunity to leave. But as has been seen, there was nothing inevitable about the decision to quit Cork, and no strategic logic had been applied to the securing of Dublin alone. Nor was it the case that by mid-May London was placing more trust in the endeavour of the Provisional Government; on the contrary, at the time when Churchill gave the order to leave Cork he had just been given advance warning that the Irish 'Unity' talks in Dublin might result in a Collins-de Valera election pact.

There was then never more reason to stay put and await events.¹⁴

To pinpoint a single factor in any major political decision, especially in the circumstances of Ireland in 1922, is probably unwise, and yet the evidence that a single incident led directly to what was a crucial and far-reaching decision is overwhelming. This neglected incident occurred on the 27th April when three British officers and their military driver were 'kidnapped' (and later executed) by anti-Treaty I.R.A. forces near the village of Macroom in west Cork. The loss of four men, albeit that it was the worst set-back since the Anglo-Irish War, did not, in itself, account for the strength of the storm that followed. Rather, it was the timing and particular circumstances of the incident that was to send shockwaves through government, parliament and even the British military.¹⁵

News of the kidnappings seeped into the public domain, it was not announced. After two weeks, when the lack of further news indicated that the fate of the victims could be guessed at, the storm which finally broke in the Commons led to an adjournment debate and a division on the government's Irish policy.¹⁶ Central to the attack on the government was the self-evident fact that small detachments of British soldiers were still touring around the 'wilds' of Ireland, this when parliament had been given the solemn understanding that all remaining troops were secure in the main military centres. This led, inexorably, to questions about the government's real intentions in the South, and to the purpose of retaining the troops. In defence of the adjournment debate, Chamberlain, as acting Prime Minister, had little room to manoeuvre; to have admitted the scale of the government's own pessimism would, at this point, have

fatally undermined the Treaty's, (and with it the government's) credibility. All he could do was to press the point that the passions which the incident had aroused could lead to 'blunders of statecraft and policy that might prejudice all issues which lie between Ireland and this country'. As for the need for troops to stay in Cork and Dublin, Chamberlain would venture only his 'personal' view that 'those positions should not be wholly left, and that we should still have some British troops in that part of Ireland'. He assured the House that British troops were not put in danger, and that at the time of this particular incident the officers in question had not been on duty, nor been in uniform, and had simply been visiting friends.¹⁷

The government easily survived the division, and its cause was no doubt served by the description of the dead officers as the purely innocent victims of a random attack. The truth, however, was somewhat different: the only reason why the men had not been in uniform was because they were plain clothes Intelligence officers, and as such were always on duty. If a subsequent press campaign by a parent is to be believed, at the time of their disappearance the officers 'were acting under imperative orders which left them no discretion.'¹⁸

Abiding with this knowledge, Chamberlain was simply not prepared to tolerate the possibility that this I.R.A. attack was fortuitous. The day after his mauling in the adjournment debate, he wrote to Churchill with a warning that it was now an open secret that the officers had been in 'out of bounds' territory: 'This seems to me', he continued, 'very much like the laxity which permitted of the Dublin officers sleeping unprotected in scattered hotels and led up to the murders which so profoundly

shocked us.' In other words, the spectre of 'Bloody Sunday' (November 1920), when Michael Collins's 'Squad' had gunned down 14 British Intelligence officers, was again let loose. Chamberlain had had enough, and in case Churchill still wished to pursue the present strategy he made the latter aware that it was not just the House that was 'particularly' nervous about the continuing occupation of Cork. The letter continued: 'I think you should know how strong was the feeling on this subject, all the more so as you will find that Cavan [the C.I.G.S.] fully shares it.'¹⁹

A problem for Churchill, and, for that matter, General Macready, was that neither man was in a position to dismiss Chamberlain's analogy with 'Bloody Sunday'. We do not know what, if anything, British Intelligence was up to in west Cork, but what is certain is that having successfully regrouped, British forces were making safe for a long haul. This much is confirmed in Macready's own memoir, and it is possibly telling that he should recall the, concurrent, republican seizure of a club in Dublin, where one of the British officers held was the 'Director of the now defunct Military Intelligence Department, but who was working hard to prepare it for rebirth should hostilities recommence.'²⁰ Tim Pat Coogan, the most recent of Collins's biographers, may well be correct in suggesting that if there was a hidden motive behind the series of Dublin raids on establishment premises in April, then it was simply 'sectarian', and yet the irony was that without reliable intelligence the British were left guessing.²¹ The very thought that the I.R.A. was once again a step ahead of Intelligence was a chilling one, the more so because a purge would have been in the likely interests of both pro and anti-Treaty camps; the British, after all, would not have discriminated had hostilities resumed. In short, in the same way that the British

suspected Collins's current and direct involvement in the joint I.R.A. 'Offensive' in the North,²² they could not ignore the possibility of his interest in the Macroom affair. This is not mere conjecture: more than two years later, in the Summer of 1924, Churchill recalled his fears concerning Macroom and its aftermath in a letter to his friend and former Colonial Office confidant, Lionel Curtis. Even with this lapse in time, Churchill was still needing reassurance that Collins was not personally involved, and that his, Churchill's, decision not to take action over the incident had been for the best. Curtis gave what comfort he could, and suggested that Collins's only crime was that 'his own hands were so red with blood that he could not bring himself to take the murder of British soldiers very seriously'.²³

What evidence there is suggests that Collins was indeed more concerned for the consequences of British occupation as a whole, rather than in any particular part. Insofar as the British were welcome at all, he seems to have been entirely consistent in his handling of the Cork occupation; his apparent indifference over the Macroom killings may have stemmed from the fact that he had warned Macready that he could not offer protection if British forces stayed put.²⁴ Internal documents show that in the wake of Macroom the Provisional Government's general concern was for the safety of British troops if, and when, the current Irish Army truce talks broke down; Collins's chief Liaison/Evacuation Officer, Emmet Dalton, wrote to the Minister of Defence, General Mulcahy, on the 10th May, worried that the republicans were about to issue an ultimatum to the British 'to leave the country in seventy two hours.' Dalton wanted to know if it would be possible 'to prolong the truce negotiations until the 19th inst, by which time I believe I could have the British cleared out of the

Curragh, Cork and part of Dublin.’ Writing this on the same day that Chamberlain was trying to defend these occupations in the Commons, Dalton must have known that British resolve had been dented; he believed that he now had agreement that troops would clear the Curragh on the 16th May, and that he could get Cork evacuated on any date he cared to nominate.²⁵

Dalton’s forecast proved uncannily accurate, and one suspects that Lord Cavan and Macready had already taken matters in hand by the time Chamberlain wrote the above letter to Churchill on the 11th. Given that Chamberlain’s deep mistrust of Irish intentions was well known, it may not have been the case, as he reported to Churchill, that his hand was being forced by the Army. Cavan’s warning that any reinforcements for Dublin would have to come from Cork, because he was ‘afraid’ of a home rebellion against Irish service, should perhaps be seen as a ploy rather than a threat. Chamberlain would have been a willing ally, and he no doubt used this warning to see off, finally, Churchill’s determination to hold Cork. Throughout April, Cavan and Macready had warned Cabinet that it might take 100,000 men to hold down the main occupied centres, should fighting resume, and the aftermath of Macroom now provided the means to defeat Churchill’s grand plan.²⁶

The fear that British forces might face concerted attack, once the Irish Army truce broke, was real enough, and yet did Churchill suspect that his obligatory decision to quit Cork (taken on the 12th May) would also lead to his having to fight to retain Dublin? If the fear of imminent embroilment meant that it was unwise to stay in Cork, then by the same token it would be no safer to stay in Dublin; this, at least,

appears to have been the logic employed by some senior officials, namely Tom Jones and Lionel Curtis, prior to the Cabinet meeting of 16th May. It is significant that the objective training of the Civil Service lent no intrinsic worth to the retention of Dublin alone; either there was a viable strategic policy or there was not, and in this regard, as will be seen, these officials shared the same basic values as the military.²⁷

The irony of course was that Churchill too had appreciated these values prior to the politics of Macroom, but at the said Cabinet meeting on the 16th he countered Chamberlain's doubts by exchanging old values for new. It was not difficult to impress on political colleagues the fact that Dublin was intrinsically unique, and that the likelihood of a Republic being declared there was now far more important than happenings elsewhere in the provinces. The psychology Churchill used to embellish this point was impressive; for the first time since the Treaty negotiations he was again promoting Dublin as the 'English Capital of Ireland', arguing: 'If Ireland fell into a state of anarchy we should have to re-establish a pale again around Dublin prior to reconquest.'²⁸ Symbolism won the day, though it should not be thought that Churchill was completely taken in by his own eloquence; it will be seen in the next chapter, concerning the Royal Navy, that he had no intention of abandoning Cork and the Treaty Port defences to their fate. In the meantime, however, it was going to be left to General Macready to translate the symbolism of the 'pale' into something not only workable, but endurable.

2. Back Behind the Pale.

As regards Dublin, the situation was almost normal, except that firing took place every night.

Report of General Macready to the
P.G.I. Committee : August 1922.²⁹

If, in the 'retreat' to Dublin, it can be said that Churchill had been forced to turn necessity into a virtue, then it was a virtue little appreciated by the military. Macready and Sir Henry Wilson, the former C.I.G.S., had already agreed that 'to lock up a small force in Dublin would be fatal', and as late as July 1922 Macready was still arguing that his forces did in fact, 'tie the hands' of the General Staff should it be necessary to re-occupy Ireland.³⁰ Allowing for the fact that the War Office was plying its own propaganda, in order to be rid of Irish service, there was still method in this argument, and the Army did not welcome having to police the overt politics of what Churchill referred to as a 'watching brief'.³¹

Of prime concern was the quality, rather than the quantity, of troops available to Macready. He was to retain at least 13 battalions - some 10,000 men (see Appendix 3) - but more to the point he had continually to struggle in order to keep '5,500 fighting men'. To make up the leeway in battalion strengths, recruit training had already been reduced from 20 to 12 weeks, and the War Office had admitted that this would 'affect the efficiency of the individual and the battalion as a whole for some time to come.'³² The War Office was also wont to take large detachments of Macready's most seasoned troops for other Empire emergencies, replacing them with

completely raw recruits, this despite having learnt from experience that Irish service required up to six months' special training.³³ Nevertheless, risks were no doubt thought affordable given the low-key operational duties involved; even internal War Office documents attested to the well publicised notion that British forces were kept within a strategic 'Protected Zone' of barracks around the western arc of Dublin, a 'well defined enceinte', as Macready himself was later to express it.³⁴

The reality, however, was somewhat different - as an exasperated Provisional Government was to find out. It was of course impossible to hide away 10,000 men, and any map of Dublin will demonstrate the practical difficulties faced by Macready. The western arc of key barracks needed provisioning from the eastern docks, and therefore control, and constant patrol, of the main thoroughfares across the city was essential. This, together with the strategic need to protect outlying areas, such as the aerodrome and small R.A.F. unit at Collinstown, meant that Dublin itself was the real 'Protected Zone'.³⁵

This much was to become obvious. Churchill never found it necessary, for public consumption, to define the term 'watching brief' - it was understood that its meaning would become all too clear should the Provisional Government falter and a coup be attempted - but he did find it necessary to explain it to the military. It is of interest that Macready had to press for an acceptable military interpretation of 'watching brief', and of further note that he was allowed to assume that the Army's role was to "'continue the motion" they had been practising since the truce of July 1921'. In other words, there was little new thinking involved, despite the pressure to bring a

Free State into being. Having been denied the right to hold both Dublin and Cork, and thereby keep a psychological grip on *all* Ireland, Churchill was not going to deny British forces the necessary freedom of the 'English Capital'. Anyone in Dublin, pro or anti-Treaty, who witnessed the traditional June parading of the entire British garrison in Phoenix Park (in celebration of the King's Birthday), might have been forgiven for thinking that the imperial mind had not truly grasped the changes since July 1921.³⁶

The effect of the British Army's presence, and attitudes, on the Provisional Government is central here, but in turn it is first necessary to show the consequences, to the British Army itself, of Churchill's designs. The difference, on the ground, between July 1921 and the late spring of 1922, was that in Dublin the disciplined and even popular 'Tommy' was now the only front line British target for I.R.A. aggression. It does not seem that this point was ever properly evaluated; as late as November, Macready was insisting that his Army's losses stemmed from it being an 'Aunt Sally', caught in the middle of someone else's war. Thus, although his troops were trained for major actions, they were hardly prepared for the level of guerilla warfare that would be directed towards them following the National Army's first assault of the Four Courts on the 28th June and the beginning of civil war.³⁷

The British government had become increasingly agitated with the Provisional Government's tolerance of the I.R.A.'s symbolic occupation of the Courts, and following the assassination of Sir Henry Wilson it was only a last-minute hesitation by Macready that prevented a British assault plan going ahead.³⁸ In the event, at the

height of the shelling on the 29th, little attention was given to the I.R.A. Executive's last proclamation from within the Courts. If the British were not going to provide the means of once again uniting the I.R.A., then Rory O'Connor could at least identify them as a priority target. The proclamation began: 'Citizens defend your Republic. The enemy is the old enemy ENGLAND', and went on to berate Churchill as the instigator of the Four Courts attack.³⁹ Bombast aside, the message to republican forces in Dublin was clear: the truce of July 1921 was formally ended.

Though much is now known of the attack on the Courts, at least in terms of the intense political pressure applied by London, and of the high level of material assistance given, little has been recorded of general British activities during these critical few days.⁴⁰ In this regard, the frequent British Army G.H.Q. 'situation reports' are illuminating: on the 28th, the first day of the attack, no British casualties or related incidents were reported, and the only note of caution was that 'officers living out are also being brought into the Protected Zone to which all troops are at present confined.' Whether this was meant simply to reassure a nervous London is not known, but as has already been stated, the spatial demands of British security, outwith the immediate need to supply the attacking National forces, meant that this report had only partial validity.⁴¹

On the 29th, however, British forces did come under fire, and it became clear that there was a sudden and general escalation of the fighting in Dublin: Macready was later to record that even his personal entourage came under sniper attack on this date.⁴² The first British casualties were noted on the morning of the 30th, and by

3 p.m. it was evident that British G.H.Q. was losing track of the number of serious incidents involving British forces. This later report recorded the surrender of the Four Courts, and merely added: 'British escorts and parties proceeding on duty in different parts of the city have been fired on. During the day 9 British soldiers wounded.' It should be stressed that this statistic was negligible in comparison to the losses sustained by National and republican forces on this day, and yet the point is that although the British had but a supporting role (there is no evidence of independent offensive action against fixed republican positions), for a brief spell they suffered an attrition rate as high as at any time during the 1919-21 campaign. Moreover, later G.H.Q. reports indicate that these casualties occurred not in the confusion of the Four Courts area, but in attacks on military and mail convoys between Kingstown and Dublin, and from the North Wall quays via the North Circular Road. In short, the attacks on British units were specific, and unrelated to the movement of National forces.⁴³

The general escalation of attacks on British and National forces also came as a surprise to a Dublin correspondent of *The Times*, who remarked: 'During the course of the day the rebels have extended the scope of their activities in a remarkably enterprising ... manner', and further noted 'the development of guerilla street warfare on lines similar to that directed at the British forces in the days before the Treaty.' A day later, the same correspondent observed the problems being caused by the ubiquity and prominence of the British presence:

the rolling by of an *obviously* [his italics] British motor lorry occasionally excites the comment of the passers-by. The anti-Treaty party, it is plain, are trying to exploit this circumstance ... The plain fact is that these lorries are merely engaged in the carriage of mails and supplies.⁴⁴

It proved difficult for British observers to accept that the veracity, or otherwise, of this last comment might be of complete irrelevance to republican forces and sympathisers. Indeed, the British Army itself spent a deal of time, between June and December, trying to account for its rising incident and casualty rate, and G.H.Q. reports were not above trying to explain some attacks in terms of mistaken identity (for National forces).⁴⁵ Army Intelligence, or what remained of it, also struggled with the problem, and by October it had decided on the following:

Several cases have occurred of attacks on British Troops [sic] in the City. There is no evidence of the rebels having specially prepared an ambush for our troops, but take the opportunity of firing on the first hostile target that presented itself whether P.G. or British.⁴⁶

But only a month earlier, Intelligence had reported that the republicans had acknowledged their 'operations' against British forces, and had concluded: 'This is likely to have the effect of encouraging their men to attack British Troops.'⁴⁷ In fact, there was more than enough evidence to confirm that the British were both a general and specific target, and Macready himself knew of this: at the same time as he was complaining to London of his Army being an 'Aunt Sally', he was also noting that the need to hold Collinstown aerodrome - a purely British security concern - had led to a 'constant assault' on his patrols.⁴⁸

Unlike the British, even the establishment Irish press found little problem in identifying that British forces, whether they liked it or not, were integral to the Dublin fighting. On one occasion the *Irish Times* not only separated the details of overnight attacks on National and British forces, but went as far as to explain that the reason for an attack at a certain private property was because it was owned by the War Office and housed British units. This same bomb and gun attack was listed in British Army situation reports, as was a similar event during the evacuations of mid-December, but the overall picture given by them is one of random anarchy rather than method.⁴⁹

Clearly, the accepted term 'Dublin Fighting', as applied to the National forces operations against fixed republican positions, is somewhat misleading. There was a constant guerilla campaign, before and after the surrender of fixed positions in July, and British evidence alone can point to the sheer tenacity of that resistance.⁵⁰ Perhaps one reason why the extent of that resistance has never been fully acknowledged, is because the British themselves refused to admit the consequences of it. That the British government may have deceived, in order to flatter the politics of its position, can be demonstrated, and again it was the Irish press that proved unhelpful to its wishes. When British troops finally pulled out, in December, the *Irish Times* reported the first departure in some detail, noting that 'about 65 wounded British soldiers were removed', of whom thirty were stretcher cases.⁵¹ The point here is not the morbidity of this statistic, but rather the politics of it: the numbers involved would not have been a surprise to the informed in Dublin, but they would have been to the uninformed in London. Officially, at least, these casualties simply

did not exist. When, in the Commons, a junior War Office minister was challenged over the report, he denied that there were any casualties, this despite the fact that Army reports do confirm that the first shipments conveyed both sick and wounded.⁵²

It should also be noted that the Dublin press proved to be unerringly accurate in every other detail of the final evacuation plan, so much so, that British officials became alarmed for their own security. In the end it was thought that shipping companies were probably responsible for the embarrassing leaks.⁵³

It was not the case that the post-October Bonar Law government was less forthcoming than its predecessor. Reflecting expectations that the cost to the British Army of the 'watching brief' would be minimal, ministers had tended to hold to unavoidable statements concerning actual fatalities. Put simply, Churchill stood to be hoisted with his own petard: his 'watching brief' in Dublin had been accepted with such reluctance by his peers that it was then politically impossible to post casualty lists that bore any comparison to the 'official' policing campaign of 1919-21.⁵⁴ Few needed reminding that, in contrast to 1919-21, the constitutional certainties that had sustained British forces were now suspect, and that as a result the Army might be in No-Mans-Land. To have claimed that the Army was still supporting the civil authority would have raised the unwanted question as to who, or what, constituted the civil authority in the twenty six counties at any given period in 1922. It could hardly be said that the troops were there at the invitation of the Provisional Government, and besides, as the historian John McColgan has demonstrated, the Irish Free State (Agreement) Act conferred only qualified administrative power.⁵⁵ That General Macready was a representative of the sovereign Imperial power is not in doubt, yet the rump of his

Army in Dublin could best be described as a tactical, rather than strategic, safeguard with no secure operational function. Thus, the British government was served in its purpose by no longer having to digest the official weekly 'Statistics of Outrages', which up to 1922 had marked the cost of policy.⁵⁶

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The actual relationship between the British Army in Dublin and the Provisional Government reflects almost every ambiguity that has so far been discussed. From late spring that relationship was bound to take on an unreal quality. On the one hand, Collins needed the security of British forces, and even on his own, optimistic, assessment, June would have been the earliest feasible date for a total evacuation; on the other, retention of British troops was politically unacceptable, and could only hinder his priority search for an understanding with his anti-Treaty opponents. Collins's awareness of what Churchill and Macready might intend, should he disown the Treaty, was matched only by Macready's constant suspicion that British supplied arms might suddenly be turned against him by a united enemy.

To help smooth the way, Andy Cope, using his close contacts with the Dublin government, attempted to set some ground rules for the continuing occupation. In late April he requested whether, in order to avoid 'unfortunate incidents' between National and British troops, the Provisional Government could issue an order that the former must not 'stop or interfere in any way' with British forces. The British believed that this measure was essential while the Civic Guard was not yet

operational, and suggested that an incident report, submitted to the nearest British military unit, would be enough to cover any situation.⁵⁷ The convoluted way in which Cope approached the subject suggests that he knew it to be delicate, and indeed it seems that while Collins was alive his government had no intention of complying with the request. Significantly, it was not until the very end of August, when Macready intervened personally, that the Irish Home Affairs department finally acceded to British pressure. The issue, of course, was not a minor one, and went to the heart of 'civil authority' jurisdiction.⁵⁸

By the late spring of 1922, Collins and Macready were well versed in mutual brinkmanship, an ability which, in part, had been honed on the former's refusal to take action against the republican occupations in Dublin. While events subsequent to Sir Henry Wilson's assassination, in June, are now well known, it may be little realised that Macready had been threatening action against the Four Courts since the day after the occupation began. On the 15th April he had sent Collins a 'personal' warning that the essential British communication route along the Quays had been compromised, and that action had to be taken: 'If not', he continued, 'I should be obliged to take drastic action against such garrison in order to protect the men for whom I am responsible.'⁵⁹

Even at this early juncture, it is not clear that Collins had the right to assume that the British would hold off. In response, however, all Collins did was to issue an internal instruction (probably never forwarded) stating: 'If his men [Macready's] are attacked they should reply to the fire and leave it at that.'⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Macready was

back in early May, this time noting the increasing number of hijacked British Service vehicles that had subsequently been spotted within the Four Courts. Turning the screw, he asked if Collins would object 'to my taking steps to recover them, which I am quite prepared to do. Of course if resistance is offered there may be trouble'. Again Collins appears to have been personally unmoved, but this time the pressure was enough to send two of his senior military colleagues, Richard Mulcahy and Emmet Dalton, into urgent consultation with Macready and Collins's own Finance Department; this on the basis that the only alternative to themselves or Macready taking 'politically inadvisable' action would be to discuss compensation.⁶¹

In the event, just a month after Collins had been forced to launch an assault against the Courts, he was presented with the almost bizarre reality of a bill for over £7,000, this being the value of the 30 War Office vehicles which the British claimed to have been destroyed in the offensive.⁶² In this case, one is left to ponder to whom the War Office might have sent this bill had the British assault, planned for the 25th June, not been cancelled at the last minute. Either way, the continuing debate as to why Collins suddenly relented, and decided to attack, should not lose sight of the cumulative psychological pressure that Macready had applied.

The War Office and Macready did not believe in rationing this form of pressure. In May, with the situation in Dublin daily deteriorating, the British made it quite clear that they would also hold the Provisional Government entirely responsible for the safety of British officers.⁶³ Evidently this attitude helped demarcate the political position of the British Army, as non-involved observers, but it hardly acknowledged

the established fact that the British were at perfect liberty to protect themselves; Churchill had repeatedly assured the Commons that troops could, and would, return fire at will, and - as was seen over the Four Courts scare - this edict had the Provisional Government's blessing.⁶⁴

But if, during most of the May-June period, it was convenient for the British Army to assert that it was the victim of common lawlessness, then it is difficult to see how it could hold this line after the start of the civil war and the serious Dublin fighting. That it intended to do so was made plain to the Provisional Government, and yet for most of July and August Macready tended to keep a personal distance, content to keep Collins regularly informed on the number and nature of attacks on British troops, and resisting added comment. Where comment was made, however, it was intended for a purpose: singling out a determined ambush on a troop transport, Macready noted that a passer-by had been hit during the full-scale exchange of fire which followed the attack. The British Army, he insisted, would not 'assume any financial responsibility' for those caught in British cross-fire. In turn, the Irish decided that they too could not be held responsible in such cases.⁶⁵

But within days of Collins's death, it was notable that British G.H.Q. returned to the attack on the supposed obligations of the Provisional Government. In a broadside to William Cosgrave, the new acting Chairman, Macready made reference to the recent killing of a British officer and blamed the Irish for not using 'the machinery of an organised government now at your disposal'. In highlighting the *rising* number of attacks on British troops, Macready came to his main point, leaving Cosgrave with

the blunt reminder that ‘...in none of those cases has any one been apprehended.’⁶⁶ In truth, the timing of this barrage had probably more to do with Macready’s general despondency, rather than in any conviction that firm law-and-order was possible during a sustained guerilla war; at the beginning of September, British Intelligence in Dublin had noted that National troops faced an enemy ‘which day by day becomes more effective.’⁶⁷ It is known that with Collins’s death coming so shortly after that of Arthur Griffith, few on the British side believed that the pro-Treaty Irish would have the stamina, or will, to pursue the civil war to a conclusion. As such, little could be lost by Macready exerting immediate pressure on the unknown and inexperienced Cosgrave.⁶⁸

Unknown to Macready, this new attack hit home: whereas Collins had known the British military only too well, and had, on occasion, learnt to call their bluff, Cosgrave could yet see only the power behind the warning. Writing to his own Army Chief, Mulcahy, he commented:

I don’t know anything about Macready but am certain he is totting up all these cases and may some day say he will have to take action on his own. This would I believe be not countenanced by Churchill but once action was taken might involve difficult if not serious consequences.⁶⁹

What Cosgrave could possibly do about the situation was not made known, but in any case Mulcahy made it clear in his reply that Cosgrave should stand firm, arguing:

There is nothing that we can do, more than we are doing to help these people, and I think they ought clearly to understand this. They ought to clearly understand that while circumstances here are as they are attacks like these are likely to be made, and if they wish to help us they will keep out of places where they feel there is any danger of such attacks.⁷⁰

Quite clearly, Mulcahy was giving vent to several months of frustration in this reply; the high profile of British troops in Dublin, in total contrast to the received idea, was, on this evidence, simply helping to fuel the guerilla war and widen the gulf in understanding. As if to echo Mulcahy's thoughts, the Dublin Metropolitan Police (or what remained of it) was also quick to deflate British pressure: in response to an attack on British troops on O'Connell Bridge, in mid-September, it could point only to the realities of war, in that 'shots are now of such frequent occurrence that unless actual injury is caused people take no notice and do not report such to [the] police.'⁷¹

Rather than insisting that normality was simply a matter of effort, the British Army might have assisted the Provisional Government more by learning from its own past experience in Ireland. In particular, this government was not served by the British inability to guard its own intelligence, and the fact that at some time in 1922 republican agents infiltrated British Army G.H.Q. Stolen Intelligence reports were used as propaganda against the Provisional Government, and when Cosgrave managed finally to retrieve a batch of these reports, covering the August-September period, the makings of a diplomatic row were at hand.⁷² The truth or not, Cosgrave did not want to read that the British too believed his government had ordered assassinations, in reprisal for Collins's death, and did not want to read that the British Army thought of him as not a 'sufficiently strong man to carry through the programme.'⁷³

Enclosing copies, Cosgrave wrote directly to Churchill:

The thing is an affront and a challenge in almost every line ... If the British Government is to be represented in Ireland by people like this and if reports by them are to be animated by a spirit such as exemplified in this document, then one must indeed feel very little hope of reconciliation between the nations.⁷⁴

When Cosgrave wrote this he had been in power for only a month, and although London may have believed he would not stay the course, they should have noted that he was going to be no fawn to Imperial interests. Churchill's reply was hardly calculated to improve relations; in time honoured political fashion he apologised for his Army having been caught out, but not for the deed itself. Nor did Churchill comment on a related charge that the British Army was still using titles such as 'Commanding Dublin District', when, by implication, these were the rightful reserve of National forces.⁷⁵ Had Churchill actually read these Intelligence copies, he would have found that for the most part they were hardly worth the compiling; the Army had been reduced to relying on second hand gossip and speculation, most of which could have been gleaned direct from the Dublin press. The point, however, is that regardless of the level that Intelligence was working at, the I.R.A. was determined to stay one step ahead, and could only benefit from these frictions.

But behind the force of Cosgrave's attack on Churchill can be detected the support of colleagues who were equally aggrieved at the actions of the British Army. Mulcahy, as seen, had to deal with the day-to-day consequences of its endeavour, but it fell to Hugh Kennedy, Legal Adviser to the Provisional Government (and soon to

be Attorney General in the Free State), to handle the finer points of the continuing occupation. As if the general tensions in Dublin that September were not high enough, Kennedy had to read an alarmist report in the *Irish Independent* that the British were landing fresh troops at the docks. He wrote to Cosgrave, explaining in forceful terms the results of an earlier London meeting, at which he attended. He concluded:

I need hardly say how serious the effect of this may be. It is in my opinion a breach of the arrangements come to with Mr. Collins and Mr. Griffith. I understood that there was a distinct arrangement that evacuation would proceed as far as possible ... but that on no account should fresh troops be sent to Ireland ... Yet now, apparently, without any by-your-leave, fresh troops appear to be landing in Dublin. Is this because Mr. Collins is gone? It certainly has all the appearance of a hostile act and may be fruitful of great trouble.⁷⁶

Such comment spoke volumes for the level of trust and communication on both sides, but if the Irish feared that *additional* troops were being landed they were almost certainly mistaken. What had probably been witnessed was the landing of recruits in direct replacement of experienced troops; it was earlier mentioned that the War Office, under pressure of other Empire emergencies, was wanting to do this, and it seems that Macready's fight to avert a War Office plan - to take 2,000 such men between September and December - had been lost.⁷⁷ The pressures, moreover, on troop placements in the South had all been one way, and it was not until the end of September that Churchill finally vetoed contingency plans to mobilise one or two Divisions in Ireland in response to the growing Chanak crisis in the Mediterranean.⁷⁸

On a more prosaic level, there was simply no room in Dublin for additional British troops, and the attempts to accommodate those already there was creating more than enough friction. Since handing over Portobello and Wellington barracks in early Summer, six British battalions had had to be put under canvas in Phoenix Park, and the highly visible presence of this encampment was proving to be a thorn in the Provisional Government's side. The fear that the British intended to make this a permanent feature was real; in August, Collins had extracted a promise from Churchill that not more than one battalion of this encampment would be placed in proper hutments.⁷⁹ This might seem a trivial point, and yet this encampment was becoming as much a symbol of Irish determination to be rid of the British Army, as it was of Churchill's to stay put.

Churchill was well aware that Macready faced the prospect of having almost half his Army under canvas that winter, and when Worthington Evans, the Secretary for War, tried to intercede, Churchill told him bluntly that in this instance, and until such time as the Treaty was fulfilled, there would be no option but 'to keep the men in discomfort'.⁸⁰ The response of British G.H.Q. in Dublin was hardly calculated to ease the problem: arguing, somewhat incredibly, that the War Office had no spare hutting in England, the Irish were asked to send huts from the vacated Curragh and given a heavy reminder that they had only 'custody' of this camp. Perhaps not surprisingly, Mulcahy gave a point blank refusal to this 'request'.⁸¹ As far as the War Office was concerned, the real issue here was probably the cost of quartering all Irish based troops over winter; in July this had been estimated as being anything up to £540,000.⁸²

In any event, by October, Phoenix Park had become a focus for friction between British G.H.Q. and the National Army. Following an incident in the Park, involving a National Army patrol, the British requested that all such night actions in the area be stopped in order to avoid clashes with necessary British patrols. At this, Dan Hogan, Acting G.O.C. National Army Eastern Command, rejoined: 'I must say that it is necessary for us to have occasional patrols in the Park, while I cannot see any necessity for the British to have out Patrols seeing they are never interfered with in any way by the Irregulars.' This last point was somewhat spurious as Hogan would have been well aware that sniping attacks within the very heart of British defences were not unknown. And yet on a point of principle it was made clear that Irish forces were not going to be excluded from any part of their own city. This row went as far as Cosgrave, but apart from agreeing to reduce the number of patrols, he appears to have supported his Army on the essentials.⁸³ A hidden issue here may have been the British insistence on their patrols maintaining the right to stop-and-search the public; when they did finally evacuate there was some press celebration at the ending of this 'humiliation'.⁸⁴

By the end of October, then, relations between the British Army and the Provisional Government had reached a dangerous stalemate. Macready appears to have given up hope that attacks on his troops might be prevented, and instead was content to send Cosgrave a list of ten such recent incidents, with the terse remark: 'You will note that these outrages are on the increase.'⁸⁵ In truth, apart from more concerted republican attacks against fixed British positions, it is difficult to detect any real 'increase' in attacks between June and October; from British reports there appears to have been

a consistent level of attrition consonant with the high profile that the British continued to maintain.⁸⁶

Meanwhile, Macready's more general (and often justified) criticisms of the competence of the National Army, in pursuance of the wider civil war, have to be tempered by the observations of Andy Cope. It is well known that Cope was often considered too eager to take the Irish side, and that he was no friend of Macready or the War Office, and yet one particular episode at this time was to demonstrate his concern that War Office attitudes were tripping over into sheer bloody-mindedness. Fearing that the latter was, to cover its own doubts, quoting prohibitive prices for badly needed armoured cars, Cope went straight to Masterton-Smith, as Permanent Under-Secretary to the Colonial Office, and appealed for sanity, arguing: 'We are simply hanging them up and not giving them full facilities for smashing up the rebellion if we make trouble over a few cars'. Intervention at this level worked, and the Irish got their cars at market value.⁸⁷ This case only went to illustrate that to some extent the Provisional Government and its army were prisoners to the War Office, and that the financial credit being given on arms did not extend to the heavy equipment necessary to help shorten the war. Once again, the fear of treachery that lay behind most of the War Office's actions, may have been prolonging the British Army's frustrations in Dublin.

3. The Leaving.

The position of the garrison in Dublin is and has been for some months invidious.

General Macready to the War office:
November 1922.⁸⁸

What might have happened to the British garrison in Dublin, had Lloyd George's coalition government not fallen in mid-October, must remain a matter of speculation. The formal establishing of the Irish Free State may have run more smoothly, and certainly there would have been fewer technical complications in ratifying the Constitution,⁸⁹ and yet there is no evidence that Churchill was considering a total evacuation in recognition of these occasions. On the contrary, at the end of September, Churchill had spoken with an air of finality when informing the military that on 'political grounds' he would refuse any further weakening of the Irish garrisons. At best, it seems that the coming of the Free State would have witnessed only a piecemeal withdrawal, dependent on the Irish political/military situation continuing to improve.⁹⁰

But it is hardly speculation to judge that Macready and the War Office would try to seize the opportunity to be free of Churchill's grip. On the very day of the British general election, the 4th November, Macready forwarded a memorandum to the War Office, which, although ostensibly addressed to his peers, was clearly intended for a wider audience. Macready reiterated his thoughts on the Dublin garrison serving no useful tactical or strategic function, and went as far as to say that only 'commercial

circles' stood to be impressed by British security; at 'any moment' Irish treachery could result 'in loss of life to the troops without any compensating advantage.' The only solution, he argued, was a total evacuation as soon as the Free State was established, and in case a piecemeal answer was sought he wanted it known that 'I should be unable to accept further responsibility for the safety of British troops or stores'. Macready then pressed the legal position of the troops should evacuation not take place. Convinced that any Free State judiciary would be full of former I.R.A. men seeking revenge, he noted: 'It is my full intention to resist any effort to hail an officer or soldier before an Irish court on any serious charge, by force of arms if necessary'. To this end, Macready insisted that the relevant sections of the 1920 Restoration of Order in Ireland Act (R.O.I.A.) be maintained.⁹¹

That this memorandum was crafted to be alarming is not in doubt, but the problem it presented for any incoming minister was to judge whether it was a thinly veiled ultimatum. Not surprisingly, the War Office began to play up Macready's fears the moment Devonshire took over from Churchill at the Colonial Office. On the assumption that the troops would be staying for 'some little time' after December, the War Office assailed Devonshire on the urgent need for Cabinet directions, this because of the possibility that the Free State might table legislation (feasible under the new Constitution) to counter the R.O.I.A., itself maintainable only by virtue of the flimsy 'catch-all' Article 73 of that same Constitution (see Appendix 2). While it was appreciated that the new Free State might be too dependent on Britain to risk hostile legislation, the War Office insisted that if Irish goodwill was to be their only protection then new Cabinet instructions should be issued to the military. Devonshire

was also acquainted with Macready's warning on resisting arrests with force, and with the War Office opinion that it was '...difficult not to sympathise with him.'⁹²

While the above concerns were, no doubt, genuinely held, it is difficult not to conclude that their premeditated object was to coerce Bonar Law's government to quit Dublin immediately. That decision was taken a few days later, on the 22nd November, and the Cabinet's reasoning bears all the hallmarks of a desire not to confront obstacles that could as easily be avoided. There seems to have been little Cabinet contradiction to the General Staff's verdict that the original aims of occupation - viz: 1) to have a footing in the capital in case of a republican coup, 2) to give 'moral' support to the Provisional Government, and 3) to facilitate a total re-occupation if necessary - were 'no longer urgent or have been fulfilled to best purpose.'⁹³ As the original, and later, decisions to stay in Dublin had been based on Churchill's *political* insistence, rather than on military needs or advice, then it seems that the General Staff's purpose in this was to provide a tactful means to a desired end.

It is true that by November there was greater optimism in Westminster and Whitehall, as evidenced by the Provisional Government's willingness to execute republican leaders, but even if only a fraction of Macready's fears for the future had substance then there were few grounds for real confidence. It was certainly the case that Lord Derby, the new Secretary for War, shared the Army's unease; his desire to quit Dublin appears to have been based more on concerns for the Army's morale and the prospect of further republican attacks, than on any perception that objectives had been

achieved.⁹⁴ In any event, the Cabinet decided that the Army would leave 'as unostentatiously as possible', and that Cosgrave be informed confidentially. This was all a far cry from the position of almost a year before, when the British had fooled themselves into believing that the Irish would learn to love the Treaty, and when Churchill had wanted to 'make a parade' of the British departure. This time round, Cosgrave agreed to keep all arrangements 'strictly confidential', and was all too quick to note that the evacuation was 'very satisfactory' to his government.⁹⁵

It will be seen in the following chapters that British politicians and officials were only too aware that the physical removal of the troops left many technical and legal matters unresolved, and that in some ways the problems of Anglo-Irish defence relations might actually intensify. While the British Army had continued to occupy the main Irish centres there had been a certain pattern of consistency, and yet as they fell back, throughout 1922, patent anomalies (at least to Irish eyes) began to emerge. One such had already surfaced in August, during the National Army's sea landing operations at Cork.⁹⁶ Collins had not wanted his forces compromised by the presence of the Treaty Port garrison at Queenstown, and had almost begged Churchill to hand over one or more of the British forts in order to bolster his, and his government's, prestige. Churchill chose to be obtuse, suggesting that the artillery at the forts 'was of no practical use to the Irish as it pointed in the wrong direction', but when pressed to consider the 'moral' component he appears to have been only too keen to pass Collins's envoy, Timothy Healy, on to Lloyd George personally.⁹⁷ The point here is that Churchill probably took some satisfaction from this situation: if the British had still held Cork, as he personally had wished, then it would have been futile for

Collins to have even imagined this request. As it was, these bastions of Imperial defence, comprising a few hundred men of the Royal Garrison Artillery, now looked rather isolated and vulnerable, and in the future were going to provide a constant reminder to the Irish that evacuation would never be total, or that freedom under the Treaty would ever be complete.⁹⁸ The May evacuation of the infantry from Cork had begun this process, and though Churchill made the most of holding Dublin alone, the psychological strength of the British military position had already begun to disintegrate.

General Macready would have needed no reminding of this, and the position of his garrison in Dublin was, and is, probably without parallel in modern British military history - it truly was 'invidious'. On one level, Macready's task was carried out effectively; he did manage, in a word, to intimidate both the Provisional Government and its republican opponents without the use of overt force, and to have managed this in the face of violent republican aggression, and Churchill's occasional impetuosity, required great bearing and discipline. On another level, however, Macready's task was entirely counter-productive, insofar as the British were still there and seen to be not only presiding over the civil war deaths of Irishmen, but to be integral to the structure of that war. The fact that Andy Cope, as late as October, was still exhorting Churchill to recharge the propaganda war and to proclaim that 'in this struggle the British Army has stood apart and completely inactive', went only to demonstrate that many people, and not necessarily avid republicans, still believed the British Army to have blood on its hands.⁹⁹

It has been seen that the lack of offensive action did not mean that the British garrison had either 'stood back', or been 'completely inactive', and that even in its more private dealings with the Provisional Government it did not exactly exude concessions. The intimidating attempts to discipline the Provisional Government into accepting responsibility for both British Service property and personnel were without credible foundation, but then it has also been seen that British incident and casualty statistics had to be the fault of the Provisional Government, if only because it was politically unacceptable for the British government to admit full constitutional liability for the Dublin garrison. This form of escapism had filtered down through the Army itself, to the point where even situation reports debated the hope that attacks were the result of mistaken identity. When, moreover, retaliation was not an option, any measure that might help to deny the extent of republican provocation was useful to morale.

The Provisional Government, under both Collins and Cosgrave, had tolerated the British Army's intimidation only to the extent that little could be done to prevent it. Preoccupied with the condition of their own country, the Irish leaders had somehow managed to walk the tightrope between fearful respect and contempt. With this in mind, it is hoped that this chapter can add some hard edges to the accepted view, as typified by John McColgan, that the British government and its officials maintained a 'kid-glove attitude' towards the Provisional Government. While this conclusion may be justified in terms of pure administrative/policy history, it very much needs to be balanced against the fact that the British had 10,000 armed troops sitting on the Provisional Government's shoulder.¹⁰⁰ Of course it was the case that Macready too

showed a marked restraint, as part of an overall policy, but the point remains that at the sharp end of Imperialist policy relations were rough and often tough, and did little to better any future understanding between the two countries.

Even as the last British battalions marched to the North Quays, and home, between 14-17th of December, relations remained acrimonious. On the face it, some of the departures were splendid occasions, marked by bands and cheering crowds, but behind the scenes the details of the final handover, to the now Free State government, did not go smoothly. Having at last gained access to the remaining British barracks, it seems the Irish were in no mood for formal handover ceremonies, and the National Army was either deliberately late, or missing, at the appointed hours for transfer. Realising what was happening, the British decided they would not disrupt their own timetable, even at the cost of leaving barracks, and in particular, the Magazine Fort at Phoenix Park, temporarily abandoned.¹⁰¹ The British Dublin command had also to explain to the War Office that in order to preserve a semblance of harmony the departing troops would not, as planned, have their flanks protected by their own armoured car columns. Finding this idea provocative, the Irish Army command had insisted that Free State troops would perform this service.¹⁰²

Even at the last there was no meeting of minds, nor mutual understanding that a new relationship had come into existence. As Macready sailed, for the last time, from the capital of the now Free State he left behind a divided country at war - a country that had been at war when he first took command some three years previously. It may have been a different war, but had the continued presence of the Imperial Army helped bring about a different country?

CHAPTER 3 : THE ROYAL NAVY AND THE CIVIL WAR

1: Ahead Full Steam

Ships are occasionally fired on with rifle fire. One's orders are to reply heavily with every available gun, but as in these cases the sniper is probably behind a bush and the only apparent target is a cottage, some children and cows, it is a little hard.

Situation Report. Commander,
H.M.Destroyer *Vanity*, August 1922.¹

By 1922 the mighty Royal Navy had been hobbled to the extent that even its more arduous domestic duties threatened embarrassment. From taking 25 per cent of total government expenditure before 1914, and still being allocated £56 millions in 1918-19, the Navy was, by 1922, reduced to an allocation of around 6 per cent, or just £6 millions.² In terms of its continuing global commitment, Ireland was just a minor irritant that the Admiralty could well have done without, and yet its role there, before and during the civil war, provides a good illustration of a greater malaise. At the same time, that role gives an important insight into the breadth and complexity of British forces' involvement in the events of 1922, an involvement which has previously been described largely in terms of Irish military conflict and British military withdrawal.

The Admiralty appears to have taken the signing of the December 1921 Treaty, and the promise of peace, at face value, and saw the opportunity of reducing its resources and expenditure in Irish waters to a minimum. Its immediate aims were clearly set

out in a memorandum, 'Points of Naval Interest for Settlement with the Temporary Provisional Government', which was put before the Provisional Government of Ireland Cabinet Sub-Committee (P.G.I.) at the end of January 1922.³ Subject to purchase negotiations, the Admiralty confirmed that it wanted rid of its principal dockyard at Haulbowline (near Queenstown - for locations see Appendix 7), of all its coastguard stations, and was even prepared to be flexible on the future holding arrangements for the War Signal and W/T stations that were subject to Treaty obligations (Treaty Annex, Para 2 - see Appendix 1). But more importantly for the subject of this chapter, the Admiralty did not at this point see a future need for permanent naval forces in Irish waters; it was suggested that 'ultimately' these would be reduced to two Fishery Protection vessels, for which no special facilities would be required. Provided that such arrangements did not preclude H.M. Ships from visiting Irish Ports, and strategic safeguards for Berehaven continued to be met, the Admiralty made it quite clear that it did not want to be troubled with Ireland in the future. Equally clearly, the other Treaty Ports of Queenstown and Lough Swilly had already been relegated to an afterthought. Subject to Irish guarantees on Signal and W/T stations, the Technical Sub-Committee of the P.G.I. Committee approved these measures in March 1922.⁴

To a certain extent, the wishes of the Admiralty and the P.G.I. Committee were forced by the political realities of the hoped-for peace. It would no longer be either necessary or advisable to try and keep the two Flag Officer commands in Southern Ireland, and early in 1922 it seems that a decision had already been made to bring all Irish water operations under the eventual command of C.in C. Devonport. As such,

the C.in C. Western Approaches command at Buncrana (Lough Swilly) would be the first to go, followed by the C.O. Kingstown (Dun Laoghaire) command under Rear Admiral Fox. Indeed, it appears that the Buncrana post had been redundant since 1918, and the Admiralty remarked, when notifying of immediate termination in May 1922, on the 'virtual reduction' of the command to a sloop and shore establishment.⁵ The corollary to all these changes was that there was no longer a place for the standard Irish Patrol of three destroyers, usually based at Queenstown and Berehaven, and it is far from clear that the Admiralty intended to continue to support the Royal Garrison Artillery (at the Treaty Ports) in any capacity other than occasional provisioning. The projected loss of dockyard facilities caused little concern as it was intended to upgrade Pembroke Dock and use it as a permanent destroyer base.⁶ Thus the stage was set for the War Office to bear practically all the costs of maintaining Imperial defences in the coming Free State, a factor which was to prove a bone of contention between it and the Admiralty throughout the 1920s and beyond.⁷

The best laid Admiralty plans were soon, however, to be badly shaken. The Royal Navy was about to experience the same preparations for the renewal of war that General Macready had had to contemplate since troop evacuation had been halted in February. Confirmation that the Navy would once again have to enforce a rigorous gun-running patrol came at the end of March when the supply vessel *Upnor* was intercepted off Cork by the anti-Treaty I.R.A., with the loss of large quantities of arms and ammunition. The apparent ease with which this operation was carried out gave rise, then and since, to the suspicion that diehard elements within the Navy 'allowed' it to happen, in the hope that both the Provisional Government and the

Treaty would fall. But whatever the speculation (and no substantial evidence has been found to support it), the above account of the serious and consistent plans to reduce costs, and take advantage of the Treaty, may help to show that at senior level, at least, the Admiralty had neither the time nor inclination for conspiracies. The episode did nothing, however, to further the Provisional Government's faith in the integrity of British forces.⁸

After this incident, the spotlight was very much on the Navy to prove itself, and an indication of its effort, and of the general deterioration of the Irish settlement, can be gained from the following statistics: at the beginning of April the total of H.M. Ships in Irish waters (apart from the standard Irish Patrol of 3 destroyers) was 1 sloop, 6 trawlers and 2 drifters; in total these comprised what C.in C. Devonport referred to, for want of an operational term, as the 'local Defence Organisation'. By the end of April, however, C.in C. Western Approaches was requesting, as a minimum 'for protective services', 2 destroyers at both Queenstown and Kingstown, 1 destroyer and 2 armed launches at Carlingford Lough and single destroyers at Buncrana (Lough Swilly) and Berehaven. It was understood that 5 destroyers of the 1st Flotilla, Atlantic Fleet, were already on their way to Ireland, and the C.in C. made it known that their arrival might be none to soon, believing that 'in view of what looks like the beginnings of a Pogrom against the Protestants in the South, it may become necessary to send Ships to evacuate Protestant Loyalists from Southern sea ports'.⁹ What evidence there was to support this particular comment was not made clear,¹⁰ although there was plenty of evidence to suggest that the Admiralty was taking the general situation more than seriously; by July, a month after the civil war began, the total

number of ships on Irish station comprised: 2 light cruisers (plus 1 reserve), 11 destroyers and 9 minesweepers and auxiliary vessels (see Appendix 4).¹¹

Obviously, such statistics cannot provide more than snapshots of naval deployments in a situation which, the Admiralty was to admit, 'changes from day to day, even at times hourly'.¹² Even so, and allowing for flotilla rotations, the last does represent the maximum number of ships that would be provided in the post-Treaty era, and at that it will be shown to be a commitment that was barely adequate to the demands placed upon it. From May onwards, with the final British troop withdrawal to Dublin, it would be the Royal Navy alone that had the task of providing an immediate lifeline to that garrison, and to those at the Treaty Port defences, as well as providing support for what were often ill-prepared advances by National troops in the republican held areas of the west and south-west. In a war where the main anti-Treaty tactic was the dislocation of communication routes and systems, seaborne intervention and intelligence would be a major factor. So much indeed was this factor a part of British calculations, that for nearly three years, from 1921 to the beginning of 1924, the government would insist on a destroyer being on permanent standby at Birkenhead Dock in order to ferry its instructions (via plane from London to Army Western Command, Chester) in case of total communication breakdown.¹³

But in the period immediately preceding the civil war, the Navy had yet a more urgent task: with the increased availability of ships, a priority was the evacuation of vulnerable coastguard personnel and stores from around the Southern Irish coast. In the north and west, from Connemara to Sligo and beyond, the evacuations went

smoothly, with the commander of H.M.S. *Warwick* reporting that the local attitude to the Navy 'was all that could be desired.' The same was not true, however, in the south and south-east: stealth was needed to evacuate Carnsore W/T station (Co. Wexford), as the commander of H.M.S. *Watchman* noted that the nearby coastguard buildings 'were occupied by 15 I.R.A. and preparations were made to land all available armed men, and guns were cleared away ready for use.'¹⁴ But if the Admiralty was willing to encourage such escapades in known hostile areas, it was doubtfully as sanguine over similar reports from Buncrana, the principal coastguard and naval depot on the shores of Lough Swilly. When H.M.S. *Dauntless* arrived there, in late May, the fact that there were National troops stationed nearby, waiting to take transfer possession, seems to have made less impression than a rumour of a pre-emptive attack by republican forces from Donegal, and the knowledge that the few coastguards had only revolvers to protect a large depot with no landward defences. Agreeing, reluctantly, with the local C.O. that in the event of a sudden attack *Dauntless* would have to shell the station and its barracks, her commander reported that an immediate transfer to National forces was needed in order to prevent the Navy becoming embroiled.¹⁵

In fact, there is no evidence that such a republican strike was even planned,¹⁶ yet the naval situation reports in this May-June period clearly illustrate the growing unease and chaos that was the prelude to civil war. Indeed, had I.R.A. intelligence but known it, there was a far more valuable and tempting target in Lough Swilly than the Buncrana naval depot. Throughout the summer months of 1922 the salvage vessel *Racer* was engaged in retrieving large amounts of gold bullion from the wreck of a

former warship; so sensitive was the government to the worsening political situation that *Racer* had orders that no gold was to be landed in Irish territory, North or South, and instead had to be taken to waiting escorts at Stranraer. As if naval patrols were not hard pressed enough, *Racer* had also to be given permanent destroyer protection.¹⁷

Notably absent from naval reports in the Lough Swilly area was any mention of contact with, or the pre-war preparations of, the British garrison at Dunree and Lenan forts, both at the remote northern end of the Lough. Unlike Buncrana, these bases were protected on the landward side by ditches and wire, but Lenan was overlooked by a high hill and was vulnerable to attack. Of the other Treaty Port areas, the Berehaven forces and those at Spike Island (Queenstown-Cobh) had natural protection, but those forts on either side of the entrance to Cork Harbour, Camden, Templebreedy and Carlisle, presented tempting landward targets (again, for locations see Appendix 7).¹⁸ When, at the beginning of June, S.N.O. Queenstown¹⁹ received reports from Dublin of a planned I.R.A. attack at 'one of the forts at Queenstown', he was alarmed enough to request that a cruiser supplement the destroyers already on station; his particular worry was Templebreedy fort, which had only barbed wire protection on its landward side. The cruiser *Danae* duly arrived, and was to remain in 'a thorough state of defence at all times', with her commander reporting that ammunition was ready at all six inch guns.²⁰ These ships were not play acting: on the night of 8th June it seems that most of the people of Queenstown were awoken from their beds when *Danae* fired across the bows of a steamer that had refused to stop and be searched.²¹

Such action might seem heavy handed, until it is realised that once a vessel was allowed to dock, or proceed up-river to Cork, it entered republican territory - the self-declared 'Republic of Munster'. Since April and the previously mentioned Macroom killings, the British government had been well aware that the Provisional Government's hold on this area was practically non-existent, and it gave one cruiser's captain little pleasure to report that at Queenstown itself 'A republican general lives in Admiralty House over which fly the republican colours.'²² As such, the Navy and the surrounding garrison had to become increasingly self contained; the cruiser *Dunedin* had to arrive with £5,000 in cash, as the Queenstown branch of the Bank of Ireland could not keep large deposits 'on account of gunmen.' When the cruiser *Danae* left Queenstown, at the beginning of the civil war, it was noted that the situation on shore was 'very bad' and had been too dangerous to allow any shore leave in the previous fortnight. This sense of isolation was only added to by the suspicion of Provisional Government treachery; S.N.O. Queenstown directed that all written naval reports should go by ship to Belfast as he believed such mail was 'liable to be censored by the Free State Authorities.'²³

There was some irony in this general position. While the situation on shore descended into chaos during May and June, the Royal Navy could only look on, a prisoner of its own element. Churchill's 'Sentinel Towers', conceived and maintained to protect these same sea approaches, were now vulnerable to real and perceived enemies which were at their backs. While the attentions of most historians of this period have focused on the centrality of Dublin, and the crucial operations against the Four Courts occupation, none has considered the position of the British government,

or the fate of the Treaty, had just one of these coast defences been successfully overrun.

At the time, however, the Admiralty and War Office had to be only too sensitive to this possibility: Appendix 5 shows the co-ordinated 'Defence Orders' for Queenstown in the case of attack, and it will be seen that in the first instance the plan of battle relied heavily on naval units coming to the assistance of the shore forts, an operation which would have demanded accurate co-ordination and communication between the military and Navy. Had such an attack taken place it would have been a severe test of the traditional British belief, alone among the European powers, that coastal defence positions were best directed by the military rather than co-ordinated naval forces.²⁴ Again, the irony was that no one had foreseen, given the planning for conventional big power war, that the Navy might have to range in to protect the Army, rather than Army guns ranging out to assist the Navy. During much of this May-June period the destroyer *Watchman* was anchored in the Outer Roads of Cork Harbour with that sole duty.²⁵

The only British insurance was the overwhelming firepower that the Navy could direct on any coastal position, and the knowledge that ships were invulnerable to the small calibre weapons available to anti-Treaty forces.²⁶ Nevertheless, and despite the fact that both the British and Provisional Governments consistently overrated the organisational ability of the republican war effort, it was surprising that so little public and official attention was drawn to the role of the Navy at this crucial time. Considering that at the onset of civil war there were almost daily parliamentary

questions on the fate of the British Army in Dublin and on the Border, one has to search hard for any official reference to the Navy. Nor, it seems, were such questions encouraged: when Viscount Curzon alone expressed concern for naval detachments, after the British Army 'retreat' from Cork, he was advised to direct his questions to the Admiralty itself.²⁷ It was of course possible for both the governments concerned to suppress unhelpful scare stories or wider enquiry; the *Morning Post*, for example, took a dim view when in August one of its correspondents was refused entry to Southern Ireland by military censors.²⁸

The suggestion here is that to an extent the British government wanted to play down the contingency role of the Navy, and thus further the notion that events were solely in the control of the Provisional Government; this role would have to expand in direct proportion to the diminished ability of the British Army to affect matters outwith the area of Dublin.²⁹ General Macready and Rear Admiral Fox, C.O. Kingstown, were in a poor position to second guess events in the south and west of the country, and much of this responsibility was to fall on a mere Captain - Hugh Somerville R.N., S.N.O. Queenstown. Senior rank though this was, it barely acknowledged the diversity and truly onerous burden of his coming duties, comprising as they did the direction of all southern fort defences (otherwise under War Office control through Western Command, Chester), day-to-day direction of all H.M. ships in Southern Irish waters, and liaison with front line National forces so as to co-ordinate Irish military - Royal Navy strategy.

This position was not arrived at by accident. When Vice Admiral Gaunt, C. in C. Western Approaches, was informed of his imminent withdrawal, he was also notified that henceforth Captain Somerville would share command and liaison duty with Vice Admiral Fox. On paper this appeared credible, but when it is considered that all evidence points to the Kingstown post being largely ceremonial, then it is plain that in reality executive command had passed to a junior rank; a sleight of hand that was going to take some explaining to the informed hierarchy of the Navy.³⁰ As has been mentioned, under normal circumstances the duties of the Buncrana Flag station would have passed directly to the area responsibility of C.in C. Devonport, and yet he was informed only that this 'general arrangement' had been postponed because of the 'exceptional situation' that had arisen over the delayed transfer of Haulbowline dockyard.³¹ This curious reasoning may have bought a temporary silence from Flag Officers, but as the Irish crisis lurched into full civil war it became evident that neither he nor, more importantly, Admiral Sir John de Robeck, C. in C. Atlantic Fleet - whose ships were bearing the brunt of Irish patrols - was prepared to accept the irregular command structure that the Admiralty was imposing. By the end of August it seems that the Admiralty was forced to explain to de Robeck the politics as well as logistics of its decision, and in so doing the scope of its contingency planning was revealed:

It was found quite impracticable for any Authority who was not in close touch with the Colonial Office to give any orders, and the only authority who could do this was the Admiralty. The situation is of a peculiar nature and changes from day to day, even at times hourly, and the only people who can deal with it are those on the spot ...

you will realise, therefore, that only the Admiralty could give instructions to these S.N.O.'s. [Queenstown and Belfast]. Frequent requests are received from the Colonial Office (Irish Committee) and the Northern Government, and you may be aware that a Committee

sits once or twice a week at which C.N.S. [Chief of Naval Staff] and C.I.G.S. are present and the actions on decisions arrived at can only be issued from the Admiralty.

The C.I.G.S specially asked that the S.N.O.'s should be given discretion to act at once, if necessary, without referring to the Admiralty: this they have done with the approval and support of the Admiralty in all cases.³²

In this same disclosure de Robeck was advised of what he probably already knew, in that C.in C. Devonport had spoken previously to the First Sea Lord and informed him that in this situation he was not prepared to take 'any responsibility in connection with Irish matters'. But what was good for one Flag Officer was good for another: isolated with the bulk of the Atlantic Fleet at Invergorden, de Robeck was deeply unimpressed with this Admiralty strategy. He now knew for certain that the Navy's contingency role in Ireland was planned to be anything but peripheral, and if things went wrong then someone, and it would not be the humble S.N.O., might have to pick up the pieces. In reply to the Admiralty he made it known that he too wanted no responsibility for ships, or their actions, in Irish waters, and pointed out that the task of the commanders of these same ships 'is one of more than ordinary difficulty.' Somewhat predictably, his offered solution was that there had to be a Flag Officer on board a cruiser in order to give effective command and boost morale.³³ This, of course, was exactly the type of profile the government was trying to avoid.

It has been suggested before that in comparison with the blundering inattentions of the British government during the 1916-21 period, the Irish policy of 1922 was conducted with a general prescience and firmness that bordered on the remarkable. It has been seen that this was not always the case with Army movements, but

nowhere was this new understanding better displayed than in naval operations. For the Admiralty of 1922, a break with tradition and ranking protocol was no easy matter, yet it was the very seriousness of the situation, and the increased significance of the Navy's role in Ireland, that dictated an acceptance of change. It was not just a question of communication and flexibility: a sea based admiral with his 'Fleet' would have given a weight and political profile to naval actions which was simply unacceptable, not least to a nervous Provisional Government. The beauty of the planned arrangement was that the British government could enhance the illusion of paternal non-involvement in Provisional Government affairs, and also make the Navy, apart from its expected role of gun-running prevention, almost 'invisible' to outside scrutiny. While the Irish, both Treaty and anti-Treaty, had to make sudden and reluctant preparations for war beyond Dublin, the British were already in place and waiting.

British warships in the war zone were well aware of the S.N.O.'s authority, 'under whose orders come the patrols extending along the south and west coast ... as far north as Lough Swilly', and of their 'principal duties'. These were:

1. To stop importation of arms - by stopping and searching fishing boats and shadowing suspicious vessels.
2. To prevent transport of armed Republicans by water.
3. Assist Free State Troops in any way they will accept help, Searchlight or Bombardment.
4. Protection of residents and private or public property from outrage.
5. Transport of G.P.O. mails (all railways being out of action).³⁴

Apart from the assertive use of 'Bombardment', this list holds few surprises, and was obviously intended to allow for discretion. The question it raises, however, is to what extent the Dublin government and its National Army was going to be involved in its implementation? It was not, in fact, until February 1923, towards the close of the war, that Richard Mulcahy, as C.in C. National forces, first approached External Affairs on the subject of naval contact in order 'to have a definite routine established by which such communications would be transmitted in an agreed and expeditious way.' The timing of this request is important, as it coincided almost exactly with his having to inform the Irish Army Council (Mulcahy was also the defence minister) that his government was not prepared to legislate for 'extended powers' for the Royal Navy, and also with the Admiralty's formal notification of S.N.O. Queenstown's final withdrawal in March. The implication here is that previously Mulcahy had enjoyed direct and satisfactory, if informal, contact with the Navy without having first to go through British military G.H.Q. It would seem that officially, at least, that contact had to be with Vice Admiral Fox, as it was not until December 1922, on the eve of Fox's departure, that the Provisional Government was informed that the S.N.O. would be assuming command.³⁵

The question of involvement and protocol in Dublin is not of minor interest. On the one hand no evidence has been found that would confirm Irish Army - Royal Navy communication at any level in the capital itself, but on the other, there is much evidence of direct, and at times intimate, contact between National Army commanders in the field and naval H.Q. at Queenstown. In short, it may well have been that Dublin simply did not want to acknowledge, for obvious reasons, the extent of that

association.

In the south and west that association was indeed considerable. Instances were numerous, and often related to Britain's wider security interests, a factor which led to what can be described as a 'war within a war' in the Valencia area. From the start Churchill had taken a personal interest in the fate of the vital W/T station at Valencia, the island of which was under republican control until August, when Commandant Tom O'Connor, after taking Kenmare by a sea landing, sent a detachment of National troops to hold Valencia and the land approach at Cahirciveen. Evidence that Churchill pressured Michael Collins into ordering this dangerous manoeuvre is circumstantial, but what is certain is that this detachment could not have held out without assistance from the Navy.³⁶ At the beginning of September, petrol and ammunition had to be supplied by warship to the C.O. at Valencia after his 'urgent request' for help to S.N.O. Queenstown. These British supplies were needed: between 22-24th of the same month Cahirciveen came under heavy night attack, and this time the destroyer *Seawolf* gave star shell and searchlight protection as well as providing machine-guns and further ammunition - assistance that rendered 'satisfactory results'.³⁷ After another night attack on the 7th October, which saw H.M.S. *Vivacious* intervene with star shells and small arms supplies, the S.N.O. informed the Admiralty that a warship would be kept permanently on watch in Valencia harbour until National troop reinforcements arrived. The local commandant's reported remark, that these services 'have been of the greatest assistance, and have considerably stiffened the morale of the troops', was probably something of an understatement.³⁸

A similar story was repeated at Bantry at the end of August when National forces came under heavy attack and the destroyer *Vanity* had to assist with ammunition and searchlights; *Vanity* actually made ready to bombard republican positions, although her captain understood that he could open fire only 'at the urgent request of the F.S. Commandant.'³⁹ Here was a dilemma that was common to several naval situation reports: front line commandants often wanted, and needed, naval assistance, but at what point did they dare risk surrendering *their* war to the British? It was perhaps the actions of ex-British officers, as in the example of General W.R.E. Murphy's planned drive to clear the Dingle peninsular, that best typified this quandary. Knowing the risks involved in this operation, Murphy sent a staff officer on board the destroyer *Wryneck*, moored at Tralee, to discuss naval co-operation; this he wanted, and yet it was made quite clear 'that for "political reasons", the assistance of H.M.Ships cannot be OFFICIALLY requested, but that he will be very glad if any H.M.Ships are in the vicinity at the time.' As a compromise measure, Murphy was given a radio code so as to inform when this late October drive was to commence; it was planned that destroyers would be stationed on each side of the peninsula to help in emergency and carry communications.⁴⁰

In this context, when all normal communication channels had been disrupted, the Navy had often to be the eyes and ears of isolated National forces, this despite the fact that it was a two-way process, with field commandants passing intelligence on republican movements to the S.N.O. whenever possible.⁴¹ In September, after the I.R.A. had retreated from fixed positions, S.N.O. Queenstown had to inform the Admiralty that the ordinary difficulties of civil war were being intensified 'by

apparent entire lack of communication and intelligence service.' Valencia W/T station had been ordered to pass urgent messages through any British warship as '...all other communication is by motor boat or bicycle, both of which stand every chance of being stopped by rebel fire.' As such, much needed patrol ships were sometimes reduced to static duty, as when a sloop was forced to remain at Castletownbere, at the direct request of National forces, to act as a W/T guard ship for forces operating in the Skibbereen area of west Cork.⁴²

When all else failed, the Navy had also to provide a ferry and landing service: at one point, during a clearing operation in west Cork, a destroyer had to be called in to lift troops from Bantry to Whiddy Island, some five miles distant.⁴³ Indeed, it seems that the Navy kept a close, if not actually overseeing, eye on most landing operations, particularly the major sea landings on the south coast. This could lead to friction: one of the repercussions of Churchill's refusal to hand over any of the Queenstown forts (discussed in the previous chapter), was that Michael Collins became silent on the details for a Cork landing. British military G.H.Q. in Dublin had to cipher the War Office that General Dalton, of Eastern Command, and formerly the Chief Liaison Officer, had 'hinted that Collins would give no plan for occupation of Cork via Queenstown if loan of fort was refused. Shortage of mechanical transport was reason for their objection to land at Kinsale or elsewhere in the vicinity of harbour.'⁴⁴ Evidently the British were none too pleased at the thought of a direct assault via *their* port, but in this event their interest in the landing would have become sharper still.

Although both Michael Hopkinson's and Calton Younger's histories of the civil war acknowledge that General Dalton made contact with the Navy, we are led to believe, at least from Younger's account (based on Dalton's own recollections), that the Navy was taken by surprise when he sailed into Cork Harbour with two ferry loads of troops on the night of 7th August. Given the general level of co-operation in this war zone, it is difficult to appreciate that Dalton undertook one of the most daring ventures of the whole war without proper consultation, and yet the point is that this was a Dublin planned operation and Collins was plainly humiliated by the unmoving British presence in Cork. Once arrived at Queenstown, Dalton did take landing advice from the S.N.O., but here there does seem to have been a prior intention to surprise and confuse the British as well as the republicans. Already, Britain's defence rights under the Treaty were presenting both countries with problems.⁴⁵

But any co-operation, willing or otherwise, was not going to deceive republican forces. By their every action the republicans demonstrated who they believed was ultimately responsible for the war, and in the coastal regions of the war zone the Royal Navy was met with a hostility that complemented the British Army's treatment in Dublin. Indeed, a captured republican document was alleged to have contained instructions that 'Enemy boats approaching the coasts are to be fired on by us as soon as they come within range.'⁴⁶ Direct, if hopelessly one sided, confrontations between shore based units and inlet patrolling ships were a frequent feature of the war in its early months; between August and November notable sniping incidents were reported off Kells and Dingle Bay in Kerry, and off Youghal to the east of Cork. Such attacks were invariably silenced by heavy return fire.⁴⁷

The most serious of these reported attacks occurred in the Kenmare River in July when the minesweeper *Badminton* became involved in what can only be described as a running battle. Her captain reported 'several hundred rounds' being fired at the ship, with a total of 63 rifle bullet scars on the hull and superstructure; one rating was wounded. The engagement finally ended off Lackeen with *Badminton* largely destroying the republican held coastguard station with 4 inch and 12 pounder shellfire. Even the Admiralty appears to have queried this perhaps over enthusiastic response, and the captain was called to account for his actions.⁴⁸ Deciding that the risks in this part of the country were becoming too great, the S.N.O. actually ordered a cessation of inlet patrols and port visits, only to have General Macready, in one of his rare interventions into naval affairs, overrule the order. Macready insisted that the 'moral effect' of such patrols outweighed the risks, although, once again, there is no evidence that the Provisional Government had been consulted on either decision.⁴⁹ In any event, when *Badminton* withdrew from the Kenmare River, her destroyer relief was told to try and avoid further encounters.⁵⁰

A notable feature of such naval engagements was that the Admiralty did not attempt to shield the details from Colonial Office eyes, even though it must have been known that senior administrators might take a jaundiced view of the scale of naval involvement. With Churchill being allowed by Lloyd George to run the show as he saw fit, his lesser officials could only watch and await events: the newly arrived Mark Antrobus, whom Tom Jones records as being the 'nucleus' of the reshaped Colonial Office, and heir apparent to all Irish Office functions,⁵¹ was not amused by the turn of events; at one point, after reviewing reports of naval actions, he exclaimed that

'we can't do anything with these very scrappy reports on the fringes of things.'⁵² Many of these situation reports were indeed 'scrappy', betraying the nervous energy of naval officers who often believed they were anywhere but on the 'fringes of things', but then again Antrobus would have known that the Navy was indeed involved in a war, and that the peace process would have to wait its turn.

That this war involvement did not, on occasions, escalate out of control in the vicinity of the Treaty Ports was as much a matter of good fortune as it was fine judgement. The vulnerability of some of the British forts has already been stressed, but at Berehaven it was the garrison's mainland landing point at Castletownbere which was the weak link. At the end of August, after a British shore party in the town had received several casualties in an ambush, the destroyer *Vanity* arrived to find that the British C.O. at Berehaven was planning a shore raid to 'round up' known I.R.A. gunmen. The Navy intervened, and *Vanity*'s commander reported the situation with the warning: 'I don't think it would be a success and it seems to be entirely against our policy in Ireland and very liable to give offence to the Free Staters.'⁵³ True though these words may have been, in reality the standing orders forbidding armed British landing parties were meant to be broken in situations where a British garrison felt compromised. In October, H.M.S. *Leamington* was instrumental in laying a trap for republican forces during an anticipated night attack; after a pre-arranged signal from shore to ship, she landed an armed party of marines, with apparently successful results.⁵⁴ Here, as so often with naval actions in 1922, there was again a fine line between defensive and offensive action, between merely supporting the Provisional Government and fighting their war for them.

The same could be said for Queenstown, although here British interests extended over large areas of land and difficult waterways, where attempts to pin down the I.R.A. proved elusive; the earlier mentioned eve of war plans against a full attack (Appendix 5), gave way, in the event, to purely reactive measures against hit-and-run tactics. Too often the Navy was left chasing shadows, as in July when the S.N.O. received firm intelligence that the republicans were planning to block the channel below Queenstown; the cruiser *Danae* immediately sent an armed party of marines up river only to find that the deed had been done and the channel blocked just below Cork itself.⁵⁵ The Admiralty had later to advise Lloyds Shipping Report that because of risk of sniping between Cork and Queenstown it was 'not advisable' for any vessel to try and clear Cork.⁵⁶ Only a relative peace ensued from General Dalton's clearance of Cork in early August, and the Navy could do nothing to prevent the kind of ambush which left four British soldiers badly wounded after a military launch was surprised on routine duty between Camden and Carlisle forts.⁵⁷ The full assault for which the Navy had planned never came, but even as the attrition continued into November the priorities were still in place; when H.M.S *Dragon* arrived at Queenstown that winter she reported that a 'squared chart has been obtained and all calculations made ready for supporting the military by gun fire'.⁵⁸ Perhaps the republicans' greatest failure was the inability to make this happen, to expose the depth of the continuing British presence in Ireland, and the reliance that both the British and a reluctant Provisional Government had placed on the Royal Navy.

2. Full Astern

[Churchill] said that the first point was that it was vital ... to gather together a sufficient force to hold the water line ... He hoped that later the Secretary of State for War would state how the British part of this force could be obtained.

Cabinet minute on Chanak crisis,
September 1922.⁵⁹

The reason for the recall ... is given as the improving conditions in Southern Ireland.

The Times, on the withdrawal of
destroyers from Irish waters.
October 1922.⁶⁰

The Admiralty's balancing act in the early months of the civil war, already complicated by the political in-fighting over the Irish naval command, was continually at risk from two other factors. The first was that no matter how many already scarce ships were dispatched to Ireland there would always be pressure for more, particularly when the Northern Ireland government was demanding naval protection. As early as May the Admiralty was calculating that it would have to remove a destroyer based at Carlingford Lough if it was to meet the patrol demands of the South, and it was hoped that the Northern government might even buy and crew its own armed launches to augment the defence of Carlingford.⁶¹ This idea came to nothing, and under the indirect pressure of Major-General Solly Flood, the Northern Ireland chief of security forces, the C.I.D. Sub-Committee on Ireland agreed to meet at the beginning of June to consider 'Naval Measures for the Defence of the Waterline Boundary of Ulster'. At this meeting Solly Flood requested naval protection on all principal waters subject to I.R.A. incursions. Clearly this was going

to be impossible, and the Admiralty had to insist that on inland waters there were anyway technical reasons - such as ships' draughts - that prevented compliance.⁶² Notwithstanding this pressure, the Admiralty had also to console its own S.N.O. at Belfast, who wanted it known that 'the presence of a cruiser at Bangor and a T.B.D. [Torpedo Boat Destroyer] at Belfast had a good moral effect.' No doubt they did, but by July the Admiralty had to advise him that it was not possible to provide any extra protection for Belfast docks, and that if extra were needed the Northern government would have to provide.⁶³

The second factor was potentially far more embarrassing, and was one that no amount of ships seemed likely to remedy. There was no question that the Navy was providing more than just helpful assistance to the Provisional Government, but this was, in effect, its 'hidden' role, and one that could not be advertised for fear of embarrassing Dublin and aiding republican propaganda. However, in its accountable role, of being seen to blockade and intercept republican shipments, the Navy's patrols were an abject and expensive failure. When, in July, Churchill wanted statistics on naval operations, he was informed that up to that date there had been a total of seventy six interceptions, of which ten had been sizeable vessels and the rest fishing boats. The only 'success' had been in early June when the S.S. *Seattle Spirit* had been stopped and ammunition found, and even then the Admiralty was convinced that the circumstances of the find made it an isolated case.⁶⁴

The Admiralty had no intention of disguising the situation, informing the Colonial Office that 'although the patrols in Irish Waters have been most vigilant and painstaking, their activities have not been successful in intercepting Coasting Vessels who [sic], it is understood, are now considered by the Free State Government to be the chief offenders in gun-running'.⁶⁵ For obvious reasons the British Army Council was also alive to the Navy's failure: by September it was advising the P.G.I. Committee that although it acknowledged the Navy's task as 'both difficult and arduous', there was 'little doubt' that gun-running still continued, and that therefore every effort had to be made by Customs and Excise, and Scotland Yard, to stop gun-running at source - in British ports.⁶⁶ Easily said, but there were those who still had their doubts. As an internal Admiralty minute argued: 'Little is being done by Customs Officials to stop arms going in to Ireland, in fact, it has been suggested that the Customs Officials at Ayr are assisting the I.R.A.'.⁶⁷

At point here was the virtual collapse of reliable British intelligence since its zenith in early 1921, a factor that was literally proving costly to the Admiralty in terms of damages for the wrongful arrest and detention of shipping. A crisis of confidence came in late August when intelligence sources pinpointed a steamer, the *Wicklow Head*, which had just left Hamburg for Ireland. Enough was enough: the Admiralty advised the Colonial Office that this time it was not prepared to arrest the ship unless the Provisional Government agreed to meet any demurrage charges.⁶⁸ Lionel Curtis, as head of Irish affairs at the Colonial Office, shared this scepticism and took the problem direct to his old friend, and political chief, Churchill, warning him that although he [Curtis] had arranged for the Irish to accept responsibility for the arrest,

there could be embarrassment all round, especially as the *Morning Post* had got wind of the story. Curtis's lambasting of the intelligence procedure is informative:

Hitherto all this kind of intelligence work has centred on Dublin. Henceforth there are to be three organisations, one here, one in Belfast and one in Dublin. The London and Dublin departments have already got at cross purposes ... I now find there is no liaison between the Intelligence service here and in Belfast, and I have written Sir Wyndham Childs [Asst Commissioner, Metropolitan Police] to suggest that the first communication to be made by the police in Belfast [re *Wicklow Head*] should have been made without a moment's delay to him. The different Intelligence Services ought not to develop into water-tight departments. They must learn to keep in touch with one another.⁶⁹

Curtis was also concerned about possible representations to the German government 'who have committed a breach of the Versailles Treaty in allowing the stuff to be shipped.'⁷⁰ In the event, however, his, and the Admiralty's deeper qualms, proved well founded and nothing but general cargo was found when the *Wicklow Head* was searched. But Curtis had at least done his job well: when the ship's owners presented an immediate claim for damages, it was a simple matter for the Admiralty to disclaim liability and direct the company to what, until then, had been just an interested bystander - the Provisional Government.⁷¹

Nevertheless, by late summer the Admiralty had far greater concerns than the attempted outwitting of either the I.R.A. or Provisional Government. Indeed, its candid approach to patrol failures may have been designed to support its constant claim that the Navy was no longer in a position to waste ships for what one official referred to as 'barren results'.⁷² The pressure for ships of the Atlantic Fleet to

resume 'proper duties' led to the Chief of Naval Staff requesting the withdrawal of the Irish patrols as early as the beginning of August, and yet although Churchill agreed only in principle that the patrols might be 'somewhat reduced', it would not be long before the Admiralty produced an overwhelming reason for immediate reductions.⁷³ The catalyst was the developing international crisis in the eastern Mediterranean: put simply, Admiral Brock, C.in C. Mediterranean, did not have enough ships to cover the emergency, with the result that battleships, cruisers and a destroyer flotilla had to be taken from an Atlantic Fleet already depleted by its Irish commitments.⁷⁴

It is interesting that in the light of the Chanak crisis Churchill was willing to assemble a Cabinet Sub-Committee to discuss further troop withdrawals from Dublin, yet had declined to allow the P.G.I. Committee to arbitrate on naval withdrawals. Instead, he opted to delay any firm decision in the hope that an inter-departmental solution might be found.⁷⁵ His dilemma was indeed acute: while the Admiralty's arguments were now irresistible, this was not the time, at the height of the civil war, to send signals to the republicans, or, for that matter, to a faint-hearted Provisional Government, that the Royal Navy was in retreat. Moreover, it was Ireland and not the far away neutral zones of the Dardenelles that still dominated the domestic news, and the reaction of his Unionist colleagues to naval withdrawals would be predictable. Nor was Churchill going to receive comfort from his mentor Lionel Curtis, who was busy shaping a long term Colonial Office 'view' of the Chanak crisis. After the Admiralty had tried to lobby him, explaining the predicament, Curtis pulled no punches in giving his verdict to Churchill:

In considering this subject, it is very necessary to keep in mind that in withholding from the Irish Free State any right to organise Naval Forces of their own for five years at any rate, Great Britain specifically undertook to discharge these functions.

Reminding Churchill of the contents of Article 6 of the Treaty, and of the scheduled conference in 1926, which would determine Ireland's own share of coastal defence, he continued:

It is of vital importance to our position at that Conference that we shall be able to show that these naval functions have been adequately discharged by the British Navy ...

To neglect any precautions which might have the effect of cutting off the rebels from their supplies is likely to prove a very expensive policy in the long run, and will prejudice our position when the time comes for Ireland to claim the right to a Navy of her own.⁷⁶

These were not words that Churchill wanted to read, despite the fact that Curtis was espousing principles that would be held dear by Colonial Office officials in the coming years. On this occasion Churchill would have, in part, to reject the advice on grounds of expediency, rather than conviction, and yet he was determined that if reductions had to be made they would be done on the quiet and not exposed in a forum. As such, it seems that Curtis was given the personal task of reaching a compromise with the Admiralty, with the result that an agreement for the immediate withdrawal of 2 cruisers, 2 destroyers and 4 minesweepers, was greeted by Churchill with a scribbled annotation: 'I agree. Keep all movements secret, so that they are not missed.'⁷⁷ But once the Admiralty had been given this green light, in mid September, it seems that the cuts went deeper still; indeed, the proposed strength of

the Patrol, as from October, makes for an interesting comparison with that on station at the end of July (see Appendix 4). Within three months, there was, all told, an effective reduction by half of cruisers and destroyers, from 14 ships to 7, and this was not to include the withdrawal of virtually all minesweepers and trawlers which would anyway have had to have been withdrawn from winter service on the Atlantic coast.⁷⁸

There was, of course, no way in which withdrawals on this scale could be kept 'secret', and in its attempt to conform and disguise what was happening, the Admiralty was in danger of turning a serious and delicate situation into farce; one can only imagine the reaction of S.N.O. Queenstown and ships' captains to the Admiralty order that 'by shifting their anchorage frequently the deterrent effect on gun-runners will be much the same as if the patrols were still in place.'⁷⁹ With the *Morning Post* to the fore, the press published the 'secret' on the 5th October, at which point Churchill appears to have decided on tough tactics to avoid a row: a Colonial Office press release of the same day simply denied the recall of ships and claimed they were 'remaining on duty as previously.' This release was carried by the press the following day without question, although as both *The Times* and *Manchester Guardian* had taken the line that recalls indicated an improved situation in Ireland, it is not quite clear what their readers were supposed to make of the subsequent denial.⁸⁰

But if it was one matter to dupe the press, it was quite another to try and dupe the Provisional Government. There is some evidence that the Colonial Office was willing to bring Sir James Craig into consultation on withdrawals, but the same does not exist for Collins's successor, Cosgrave, who, it seems, was denied information even on an informal basis: in October, Cope was instructed to tell him nothing without London's approval.⁸¹ Again, the absence of material confirming intra-Dublin communication on naval matters in this period becomes crucial. It is quite possible that in this instance Churchill felt able to exploit Irish sensitivity, knowing full well that neither Cosgrave nor his Army chief, Mulcahy, could afford to comment.

It was perhaps fortunate for Churchill that the forced recall of ships coincided with a general collapse in the republican position. Together, these points would account for a marked fall in recorded incidents involving the Navy during the autumn and winter months of the civil war, as would the effect of winter sea conditions. But incidents there still were, and one of them was to expose the fragility of the British position on the eve of the final troop exodus from Dublin. It should not be forgotten that General Macready, as G.O.C. in C., was responsible for the actions of *all* British forces in the Irish theatre, and in theory, at least, with Admiral Fox along-side, it was possible for him to continually oversee the extent and effect of naval operations. In practice, however, this cannot be demonstrated (Fox's executive authority has already been questioned), and apart from the one, earlier mentioned, policy intervention, and a couple of, largely uninformative, comments in his memoir, Macready does not appear to have concerned himself with naval matters.⁸²

What then is to be made of an extraordinary letter that he wrote in mid-November, at a time when he was under considerable strain, in which he unburdened himself to J. Masterton-Smith, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office? This 'personal' letter was spurred by a further flare up of I.R.A. activity at Kenmare in October, during which H.M.S. *Vansittart* was fired on and one rating wounded. It seems that at the request of a local National Army commandant, *Vansittart* sought permission of S.N.O. Queenstown for a bombardment of the town, and he, in turn, contacted Dublin for clarification. Macready did see and overrule this request, and at the same time passed instruction to both S.N.O.s, through Admiral Fox, that:

the Navy should adhere to the Army policy, viz., that if attacked in any way, immediate return should be made, but on no account should after reprisals take place.

By implication Macready had not previously issued such instructions, but this much was given only as background information to Masterton-Smith. The letter continued:

Loughnane rang me ... and tells me that he got a wire from the Colonial Office to go and see Cosgrave, and he [Cosgrave] was quite ignorant of the fact that the Navy has for a very long time been working, I will not say under me, for that might hurt the susceptibility of the Senior Service, but has been working in very close conjunction under my advice. Any other policy would lead to considerable friction over here ...

What I want to put to you is this, that if the Colonial Office wire these things direct to Loughnane where Naval or Military action is concerned, without my being informed, there is sure to be unnecessary trouble. As a matter of fact Loughnane will in future, I think, let me know, as he was quite ignorant of the fact before that I had anything to do with the Navy. It is just the ignorance of some people in Whitehall of the way in which we manage to keep the peace here and the system of working, which leads to occasional trouble, and perhaps

you will make it clear that whenever the Army or Navy are concerned
I should be informed at the same time as Loughnane ...⁸³

The question here is whether Loughnane, the newly appointed replacement for Cope in Dublin, had merely upset the system, or, more importantly, had inadvertently exposed it. The style of the letter gives every indication that Macready was writing not to complain or inform, but rather to try to ensure his reputation in posterity - this shortly before the final withdrawal and his personal retirement from Army life. It was somewhat typical that Cosgrave might be kept in ignorance of Macready's close supervision of the Navy, but it is strange indeed that no one else in Dublin or the Colonial Office appears to have been aware of it. In other words, had it not been for Loughnane's arrival and an extraordinary request from the S.N.O., would Macready himself have been aware of it? A last chance to re-invent the liaison system the way he would have wanted it, rather than the way it actually was, may have proved irresistible.

It has been intimated throughout this chapter that not only was the Navy's role during the civil war intended to compensate for the restricted ability of Macready's army, but that, stemming from Churchill, there was a conscious desire to play down the full extent of that role. Despite Macready's protestations to the contrary, the evidence suggests that Churchill wanted to work directly through the Admiralty to the S.N.O. - the only man on the spot - and in this manner keep contending generals and admirals, and even his own Cabinet committees, from confusing and highlighting the issue. It was a risky strategy, dictated by peculiar circumstances, and it is not clear that Churchill, or, to a lesser extent, his post-October successor, Devonshire, would have

had a ready answer had there been a serious reversal to ship or shore defence. But from a British viewpoint, and that of a humbled Provisional Government, the strategy obviously worked. The bulk of the evidence may be one-sided and fragmentary, and yet there can be no mistaking that the material and physical assistance of the Navy and its marines in the critical early months of the civil war had a marked effect on its course and duration. While previous histories of this war have, quite properly, concentrated on the internal strife - an internecine fight for ideological and political control - there has perhaps been too much acceptance, based purely on the defensive role of remaining British troops, of Britain being just a concerned and distant spectator to the wider fighting. The point is that outside Dublin, and particularly in Munster, it was the Royal Navy that made many of the National troops' advances possible, a feat that had little to do with the known task of gun-running interceptions.

And what of the legacy of this close involvement? By the time that the Free State came into existence, in December 1922, both countries had been denied the relatively clean-break from British forces involvement that the Treaty had promised. It has been seen that, at first, the Admiralty had had no intention to bother with Ireland, and yet as a result of the distrust engendered by internal fragmentation, there was going to be an ever-watching Irish Patrol, of no less than three destroyers, for the foreseeable future.⁸⁴ Similarly, this chapter, and the previous, has highlighted the newly perceived vulnerability of Britain's fixed defence interests once its troops had, all too suddenly, left the south and west. In other words, little had happened in 1922 to allow Britain to let down its guard and communicate openly, or to allow the Irish to feel free from oppressive scrutiny and occupation; much had happened to remind

the Free State government of its forced indebtedness and impotence, and this was bound to cause resentments in the future. Given that, to paraphrase R.F. Foster, the Free State's pre-occupation in the 1920s was self-definition against Britain,⁸⁵ the question remained as to whether defence relations could start afresh. How both countries coped with the legacy of 1922 and the recent past, and with the hopes for the future, is the subject of the following chapters.

CHAPTER 4 : THE CASUALTIES OF WAR

1: The Dead and Deserted

I am sure you will leave nothing undone to give him a proper burial.
It is unfair to have his remains in such a place as his are in a swamp.
He is surely somebody's boy.

Extract from a Cork farmer's
letter on the discovery of the
remains of an unknown British
soldier on his land.
September 1924.¹

Between 1916 and the beginning of 1924, almost 5,000 serving British soldiers simply 'disappeared' while on duty in Ireland. Their names were known, but not their fate. Obviously the vast majority would have been deserters, with possibly up to a third having Irish family connections, but hidden within this total was a gruesome reminder of the tactics of unorthodox warfare, tactics which no official statistics, on either side, could countenance. Only after the bulk of British forces had left the Free State, at the end of 1922, could it be hinted that an unknown number of British soldiers had been encouraged to 'desert' in order to build up local intelligence networks, and that in response the I.R.A. had executed many of these men, often killing 'genuine' deserters by mistake.² This was not, however, British confession for its own sake; the object was to impress on the Free State Government that it too had a moral responsibility to assist the British Army Council in setting their records straight. The Irish would indeed assist the British, but in the process there would be constant and painful reminders, throughout the Cosgrave years, of the differences that had, and

still did, separate the two countries.

Some events did not of course await the official departure of British troops. Almost within days of the Treaty being signed it seems that Cope was coming under Castle pressure to exploit his good relations with the new Provisional Government and bring some method to the search for the missing. Having given a sample list of men reported missing pre-Truce (including R.I.C. members), Cope followed up with a personal plea to Diarmuid O'Hegarty, Secretary to the Provisional Government, telling him: 'We are getting a good deal of pressure from various sources and it seems to me pretty hard lines on parents, wives etc. of these missing men to be kept in anxiety for so long.'³ But with the best will in the world, the Provisional Government would not be capable of providing the concert of resources that would be necessary for such an unending and difficult task. After consulting the Adjutant General, the best that O'Hegarty could offer was to contact Cope 'from time to time' as and when information became available.⁴ In the early part of 1922, however, it could not have been envisaged that the Provisional Government would soon be overwhelmed by another war, and that in consequence the total of British dead and missing, though far smaller than Irish losses, would inexorably rise once more.

For obvious reasons the British do not appear to have resumed serious inquiry until the close of the civil war, by which time it is clear that the War Office had gained active, if not official, agreement that the Irish would hand over to the British any deserters located, and that Dublin would proceed with an Indemnity/Amnesty Bill (reciprocating the Royal Proclamation of January 1922), that would protect all British

personnel from liability for pre-Truce actions.⁵ As a result, the Irish archives indicate that the Department of Defence was inundated with individual and collective cases of missing men, passed on by the Colonial Office on behalf of the War Office. Little collation appears to have been involved, the War Office simply providing details as and when individual regiments and units might respond.⁶ These same archives also suggest that on the Irish side there was little or no political/military resentment over this extra burden, and the investigating body - the 2nd Bureau, General Staff at Dublin G.H.Q. - appears to have worked diligently at the task until it handed over responsibility for the dwindling number of cases to the Civic Guard in 1926.⁷ As might be expected, results often depended on the quality of information the British could provide, and on the degree of contact the missing men may have had with Irish forces. In one particular pre-Truce case, where the British seemed unusually concerned for the fate of four Royal Marines, the Irish were, by 1924, able to notify that they were probable deserters, as no record existed of their being 'apprehended or ... molested' by Irish forces. Such distinction was important, both to the militaries and the families involved.⁸ In many cases the task was simpler - British recalcitrants had often joined the Irish National forces in 1922, and these records were to hand.

This last point leads directly to the politics which had to infuse even this most sympathetic of subjects. The lack of Irish frustration at the costs and time involved in investigations can in small part be explained by the willingness of the British not to press for quick results (at the beginning of 1924 the Colonial Office requested only a résumé of progress every three months)⁹, and in larger part by the somewhat

unexpected British understanding of the Irish commitment to deserters who had given service either to the I.R.A. or to later National forces. At a formal meeting in London in October 1923, a seemingly amicable agreement was reached between Mulcahy, as Minister for Defence, and the Lords Derby and Devonshire, on the procedure in such cases. Henceforth, the Irish authorities would not be required:

to apprehend and return deserters from the British Army who deserted at any date prior to the 1st November 1923, and gave service in the Irish Forces, whether pre-Truce or in the present National Forces.

With some satisfaction the Department of Defence was also able to inform the Executive Council that as a result of the agreement it was 'not proposed to take any action against such British Army deserters as have already been arrested and whose cases come within the terms of the agreement'. In return, it was also agreed that the Free State government would make 'every effort' to apprehend and arrest deserters (outwith the above clauses) who sought refuge in the Free State.¹⁰

In practice the British had little choice but to allow some who would otherwise be termed defectors and traitors to go free, but there was also method behind this agreement. A workable retrieval system was necessary in order to enhance military discipline on the mainland; as things stood, the Free State might provide an all too convenient sanctuary for future, as well as past, Service miscreants. Neither, it seems, was the timing of the agreement a matter of chance: it was probably no coincidence that within days a court case involving a confessed deserter, arrested in Dublin and escorted to Belfast, began to make news. The man was apparently freed

after a K.C. had made nonsense of British pretensions to continued military jurisdiction in the Free State. The precedent thus set caused alarm at the Colonial Office; the case was brought to the personal attention of Devonshire, and it was suggested that the legal department would have to take serious note of the implications. The War Office seems to have been content that with the benefit of the agreement they could literally soldier on, but this confidence made little impression on the Colonial Office, with Antrobus noting: 'I have all along been afraid that this would happen. The procedure by which a number of deserters have been apprehended with the goodwill and assurance of the F.S. Govt has ... no real legal basis.' He suggested that legislation in both countries was the only solution.¹¹

Nevertheless, the 'goodwill and assurance' of the Free State in the arrest and returning of deserters does appear to have held good until 1926, when the legal implications began to come too close to home. The turning point came when an arrested deserter had to be released before he could be handed over to a British military escort party from Northern Ireland. The soldier's father had applied for a writ of Habeas Corpus, and the Department of Defence was advised that there was no defence to the writ in law.¹² Perhaps too, Cosgrave had grown weary of giving reciprocal support to Britain following the final, and hard won, release of all Nationalist political prisoners in Northern Ireland, and by 1926 he may have been sensitive to the political capital that de Valera and constitutional republicanism might gain if the issue was publicised. Whatever the reasons, and they were probably as much political as legal, co-operation with the British military ceased suddenly and permanently, much to the chagrin of the War Office.¹³

Interestingly, the British backlash did not, and indeed could not, come through formal dispatch channels. With no legal sanctions to assist them, the War Office protested through James McNeill, the High Commissioner in London, and if his immediate report to the Department of External Affairs was correct, then it seems that the War Office was preparing to retaliate in kind. According to McNeill, if the Irish did not resume the return of deserters then, he was informed 'that any other practice would possibly lead to complications such as the stopping of allowances to ex-British soldiers in the Saorstát.'¹⁴ It can be safely assumed that the then Dominions Office, especially with Leo Amery in charge, would not have tolerated any vendetta on these lines, but in the event the Irish did not rise to the bait, and they did not change their mind. The War Office did try once more, in 1929, to resurrect the 1923 agreement, though this time it advised that the position was merely 'undesirable'. As if to show that both the War Office and Dominions Office still harboured vain hopes of a model Dominion, the Irish government was further advised that if its present laws could not cope it should enact a new law, as per Section 657 of Canada's Criminal Code, which dealt specifically with forces desertions.¹⁵ The advice was ignored: the period of co-operation had been one thing, but there had never been even the slightest hint that the Free State would indulge in the politics of legislation to assist the British military.

.....

While the position on deserters was reaching a perhaps predictable stalemate, the related issue of the missing and the dead continued. Overall the subject was handled with extreme sensitivity on both sides, though it soon became clear that even the dead

could not escape from politics. Indeed, it was somewhat surprising that the 1923 deserter agreement had operated at all considering that the two countries remained in dispute until 1925 over compensation for British forces killed and injured post-Truce (that is, those not covered by the mutual indemnity provisions for pre-July 1921 actions). By early 1923 the British had submitted an initial sixty three such cases to the Free State, together with the relevant decree awards, and although the Department of Finance began processing the compensations it was soon apparent that, on vetting, the Department of Defence was urging a refusal of responsibility in certain of the cases.¹⁶ The British might well have been advised to scrutinise their lists more closely: in one case Defence pointed to evidence that the auxiliary officer involved had been injured only after he had made 'a violent and unprovoked assault' in a public place.¹⁷ As a result of such disputed submissions, it was perhaps inevitable that the Free State would respond with its own claims for post-Truce compensations, at which point Leo Amery intervened personally to cut short a threatened diplomatic row. His suggested compromise, in March 1925, of an agreement 'under which each Government should assume the liability for payment of such compensation ...' was quickly accepted by the Irish government. This did not, however, result in a simple extension of the pre-Truce indemnities, but rather a more judicious pruning of cases deemed suitable for submission.¹⁸

But when it came to honouring the dead, not only of the recent conflict, but also of wars where their soldiers had fought side by side, the British began to feel the full force of Irish independence. It was in July 1923 that Loughnane, who replaced Cope in Dublin, first approached Mulcahy to inquire if the Free State would consider

accepting responsibility for the future care of war graves, a precedent for which had been set by the Union of South Africa. In the interim, Loughnane suggested that the Imperial War Graves Commission might be entrusted to take on the task. The subtlety of this approach suggests that the British were well aware that they might insult Irish sensitivities on this subject, and Mulcahy's reply tended to confirm it: the Free State would indeed make every effort to give the British dead, and those being returned to Britain for burial, full military honours, but it was notable that all reference to the War Graves Commission was studiously avoided.¹⁹ The hint was not taken, however, and London tried a different tack in 1924, this time suggesting that the Free State might wish to appoint a representative to the Commission and participate in its general expenses. The Executive Council rejected this and instead voted to take 'entire charge' of military graves.²⁰

Taking 'entire charge' also meant having to relive certain incidents of the recent past which the governments of both countries might have preferred to forget. As previously mentioned, the storm over the Macroom killings of April 1922 came close to derailing the Treaty,²¹ but with the discovery of the remains of at least two of the soldiers, in the summer of 1923, the anger and scandal which had affected both countries threatened to erupt once more. Before Dublin could confirm the finds, and even before London had been informed, a Unionist M.P. was somehow able to taunt the government front bench with precise information on the whereabouts of the burials.²² In the same way that the full story of the original incident may never be known, then neither may the story of the later recovery of the bodies. If a local Cork Civil Guard report was accurate, and all the bodies had been quicklimed when hastily

buried, then it is probably as well that both governments appear to have suppressed official information and comment.²³ It was probably with this in mind, and knowing that there would be wide press coverage, that it was not until December that the bodies were escorted back to England with full military honours provided by the Free State. Officially, the original incident too could now be laid to rest: Devonshire passed on to Dublin a letter of gratitude from a grieving parent, and the Army Council's 'cordial appreciation' for the assistance given by the Department of Defence.²⁴ But such was the disgust of some diehards that even then they refused to let go: almost two years after the original incident a self-styled 'Vigilans' was writing to *The Times* demanding a full public inquiry.²⁵

If the Macroom incident came back to haunt both governments, then so too, in the most tragic of circumstances, did the notorious Kilmichael 'Ambush' of November 1920, which had left three I.R.A. men and seventeen British auxiliaries dead.²⁶ The discovery in 1925 of the body of an auxiliary officer, who was executed after the ambush, was to become a minor *cause célèbre* in both countries, and was to renew old bitternesses in the Cork heartland of republicanism. In brief, the controversy revolved around the refusal by frantic parents to accept that the remains found were those of their son, a stance which was to lead to over eighteen months of increasingly exasperated correspondence between the two governments, a situation not helped by details being published in the press of both countries during 1926.²⁷ Old angers, never far from the surface, erupted once more at a committee meeting of the Cork Board of Health in November 1926, when it was proposed to re-intern the officer in consecrated ground at the Council's own expense. While the Chairman insisted that

they had a duty to treat everyone with respect, a fellow committee member offered the rebuke that he 'objected to any expense being incurred out of public money considering that the bodies of their comrades, which were burned with lime, were lying in Cork jail'.²⁸ This outburst has to be set not only against the memory of British reprisals after the Kilmichael ambush,²⁹ but also against the pathetic and continuing requests by Cork families to the Department of Justice for the re-internment of Volunteers executed by the British between 1916-1921. In having to refuse these requests, how were the Executive Council and the Cork authorities supposed to explain that the British had been all too efficient in ensuring that not even the individual remains of potential Irish martyrs would be allowed to survive?³⁰ It was the memory of quicklime, as much as the gun, that still overshadowed relations during the later 1920s.

2. Prisoners

The moral effect that the Irish are volunteering to fight against England will be great.

A German Military Attache, on the formation of the Irish Brigade. 1914³¹

To the British, Lance-Corporal James Dowling remained one of the most despicable of traitors ever to shame the uniform of His Majesty's Services; to the Irish Nationalists he became a symbol of the struggle for independence, a patriot who remained imprisoned for his political beliefs. The fate of James Dowling was to

prove a thorn in the side of Anglo-Irish relations from the moment of independence, and the manner of his final release in 1924 possibly marks one of the most intriguing, and revealing, episodes of high politics during the Cosgrave years. Moreover, and as befitted Dowling's endeavours, some of the intrigue appears to have been played out in the military sphere.

In brief, the Dowling story began after his capture by the Germans in the 1st World War. As a P.o.W he joined Roger Casement's Irish Brigade, and according to the British was a leading recruiter for its cause. In 1918 he was landed by German submarine off the Galway coast in order to, as F.S.L. Lyons puts it, 'discover whether there were any prospects for a rising', but was soon arrested by the British as part of the so-called 'German Plot'.³² According to a later British document, he was saved from Roger Casement's fate only on the suggestion of the then Director of Naval Intelligence, Sir Reginald Hall, that he be reprieved in return for the disclosure of all his accrued intelligence information.³³ As such, after the British Amnesty Proclamation of 1922, Dowling and the Connaught Rangers ringleaders of the 1920 Indian Army mutiny became the only Irish 'political' prisoners that the British (as opposed to the Northern Ireland government) refused to release.³⁴

Despite, however, the public stance of the British government, in that Courts Martial rulings were outside the general amnesty, it was certain that Dowling would become a political pawn; it is now known that his release, and those of the Rangers, was tied up with the promised progress of the reciprocal Irish Indemnity/Amnesty Bill which Cosgrave introduced to the Dail in December 1922. The Rangers were promptly

released, and by July 1923 it seems that Devonshire had promised Dowling's early freedom in return for the said Bill, which had actually been passed in February.³⁵ According to one historian of this period, this event 'marked the formal and legal end of British military involvement in Saorstát Éireann', a view which this thesis might challenge as premature both in whole and, in the case of Dowling, in part.³⁶

In high politics, promises, by themselves, are worth little, and the contents of a July 1923 memorandum, passed between Lionel Curtis and his Permanent Under-Secretary, Masterton Smith, make it clear that there was still extreme political opposition to the Colonial Office view on Dowling's release. Curtis wanted it known that the British position was 'not good', and that they could expect no easing of Irish pressure on this issue. Of particular concern was the unanimity of support for his release, not least among 'loyalists' in both Dail and Senate, a factor which Curtis believed posed a threat to Britain at the League of Nations and at Imperial Conferences. More directly, and considering what was to follow, it was significant that Curtis also believed that the British stance threatened 'to estrange the British and Free State armies'. Further, he held that a stand on principle could not be justified, pointing out that the 1922 Royal Amnesty was granted in respect of *all* offences prior to the Truce of July 1921, and that Dowling's motive 'was clearly political'. It was noted that Cosgrave expected a Cabinet decision on the issue, and not just a departmental judgement, and to this end Curtis urged approval of a Free State proposal for a 'Committee of Judges' to review the case and help facilitate the release. In other words, in order to get Dowling free the Free State was willing to connive in a face-saving device that might help a largely hostile Tory Cabinet to

accept the unacceptable.³⁷

But this Colonial Office pressure appears to have got nowhere. When Mulcahy arrived in London for discussions, in November 1923, he was informed by Lord Derby, the Secretary for War, that Dowling would not be released, this despite an official decision being delayed by the fall of the Baldwin government.³⁸ But Mulcahy was not going to be put off by a general election; back in Dublin, Loughnane was informed that protest would be resumed the moment a new Secretary of State was appointed.³⁹ This raises the question of just how belligerent the Executive Council and, in particular, Mulcahy, on behalf of the Army, was prepared to become in order to secure a principle.

Soon after the general election the Colonial Office prepared a draft advisory note for the incoming Prime Minister, giving a history of the Dowling case and the advice that Derby had 'kindly refused' a formal rejection of Irish claims pending a new P.M. taking office.⁴⁰ At this point it may have been known that Baldwin had no intention of upsetting the diehards and that he had already been approached and given a verdict that a new Conservative government would 'not act in the present circumstances'.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the Colonial Office draft still pushed for Dowling's release, noting that Baldwin had personally been in favour, on grounds of 'general policy', and that there was now 'imperative need' of an agreement. This 'imperative' was explained, and in so doing Curtis's earlier 1923 warning of military estrangement began to have context. The new Prime Minister (soon to be MacDonald) was given a warning that urgent C.I.D. defence arrangements with the Free State were under direct threat

because of the Dowling issue. Heading the list was the 'absolutely vital' need of the Admiralty to have agreed control of Irish cable and wireless stations in time of war, and it was stressed that its requirements 'are such as no other Dominion has been asked to concede, and will be extremely difficult for the Government of the Free State to concede'. To leave no room for doubt, this same draft concluded that even if Mulcahy were to give his approval on C.I.D. requirements, he would likely be vetoed by his Dublin colleagues 'unless the atmosphere has been previously cleared on this last outstanding grievance.' - i.e. Dowling.

Unfortunately for the British government, this was not the 'last outstanding' defence related issue that caused grievance, and Curtis may have understated the web of obstruction that Mulcahy was weaving around this perceived intransigence. Another issue on which the British position was 'not good', and which the MacDonald government was also to inherit, was the continuing occupation of the small Border fort at Belleek in Donegal, first taken over during the Border troubles of Spring 1922.⁴² In September 1923, Mulcahy had given a clear signal to the War Office that unless British troops quit Belleek he would obstruct a planned command change at the Lough Swilly defences, itself a sensitive issue in that it required an extension of Northern Ireland District Command into Free State territory. Currently, all the Southern Treaty Port defences came under Western Command at Chester, and the Free State took the view that as Belleek was already under Northern command, a further extension at Swilly would be provocative.⁴³

There was then enough reason, on behalf of the C.I.D., Admiralty and War Office, why the incoming Labour government should act quickly on these key, and probably related, problems. In truth, however, there were no early indications that it intended to do so, and though there was some agitation in the party on the question of prominent Northern political internees, the new Colonial Secretary, J.H.Thomas, must have known that even this stance was likely to cause parliamentary friction.⁴⁴ Baldwin certainly feared that this would be the case; in the wake of the general election, he had written to Craig to plea for the release of Cahir Healy, the Northern Nationalist M.P. for Fermanagh and Tyrone (a figure also dear to Southern hearts), explaining that the issue was bound to be raised in the next Parliament 'on divisive terms', and that 'Labour will go to town on it.' Craig had already spurned Baldwin's earlier overtures on political prisoners, much to the pique of the Colonial Office, and the former would have known that his position was solid so long as Baldwin was unable to move his own party on James Dowling's release.⁴⁵

Once Labour was in office, however, there was simply no time to concentrate on what appeared to be incidental problems. Thomas's first, and urgent, priority was to find a format within which the long promised Boundary Commission (for which Cosgrave had kept constant pressure on London) could operate, and to this end he brought Craig and Cosgrave together in London at the beginning of February.⁴⁶ This vital meeting did not go well, and either because of, or in spite of, the threatened deadlock, it seems that Thomas decided that he had to take action where it was at least possible. While it is accepted that policy itself may have begun to 'drift' at this point, it has been seen, not least in terms of Britain's own defence interests, that the

position was far too volatile to allow any drift in executive attention.⁴⁷ The first inkling of movement came on the 8th February when the Press Association hinted that the question of political prisoners 'may shortly be settled'; confirmation of Dowling's release came the following week, though only the republican organ *Sinn Fein* seems to have heralded the event, and at approximately the same time, if not simultaneously, Cahir Healy was also freed by Craig.⁴⁸

In this same week, and spurred on by his own officials, Thomas also turned his attention to the situation at Belleek. Curtis advised that the British had to pull out, and that a formal request for such could be expected from Cosgrave 'very soon'. He added that the government 'could hardly refuse to comply', as there was no longer a military justification for the retention of British troops; it was known that G.O.C. Northern Ireland concurred: 'indeed', Curtis argued, 'there is reason to believe that he would be glad to withdraw the platoon.' It was suggested that on Mulcahy's expected return to London, in late February/early March, he should be informed of British intentions, but that in the meantime both Sir Stephen Tallents, the Imperial Secretary to Northern Ireland, and G.O.C. General Cameron, should see Craig and explain the predicament. The whole tone of this missive suggests that Curtis knew Thomas to be receptive, and it was a measure of the new urgency being injected into matters that the approach to Craig was urged despite the acknowledgement that it could prove counter-productive. With Craig being difficult over the Boundary Commission, there were obvious doubts about raising the problem of the Border post; the Northern government wanted Belleek held as a matter of continuing security.⁴⁹

There is no doubting that the Labour government, daunted by the Craig-Cosgrave meeting, and the defence warnings of the Colonial Office, did try to better relations with the Free State, this even at the cost of temporarily aggravating relations with the North. But the irony in this process was that the man who had done so much to goad the British into action over Dowling and Belleek, Mulcahy, received no personal benefit. He was not to make his planned return visit to London: by February his position was being threatened by a growing rebellion within the 'Old' I.R.A. factions of the Irish Army, and in March this mutiny would force him into a 'scapegoat' resignation. There is no evidence that British decisions were directly affected by this threatened revolt, or vice versa, yet by the same token the previous stonewalling of the Bonar Law and Baldwin governments had hardly assisted matters; Mulcahy had been attempting to thin out and professionalise the old I.R.A. elements in the Army, and it did not help if these erstwhile supporters believed, falsely, that he was aiding Britain on these defence related issues.⁵⁰ In truth, his careful tit-for-tat obstructions smacked of political sophistication: during this episode, one Colonial Office official paid him the unintended compliment of being 'disingenuous'.⁵¹

Nevertheless, defence relations did improve after Thomas had instigated change. Belleek was not finally evacuated until August, but there seem to have been no further objections to the Lough Swilly command change, and a more tolerant line was taken on the wartime use of W/T stations. By June, Hankey, as Secretary to the C.I.D., had put forward new proposals for control of these stations, and agreement was later confirmed 'in principle' by the Executive Council.⁵²

3. Reservists

[H.M. Government] will now have to depend for the machinery of calling them up, and for enforcing the law against any recalcitrants, upon the goodwill and co-operation of your ministers.

British appeal to Ireland on the position of reservists. August 1923⁵³

When the bulk of British forces left Ireland in 1922, there remained a number of awkward personnel problems that had no obvious solution, and for which no provision had been made in the Treaty. One such was the position of a small, but significant, number of Irish reservists. An agreement to cease recruiting and disband the Southern Irish regiments of the regular Army had been reached,⁵⁴ but this particular question remained open and was to have intriguing implications. Reservists had been recruited, and were retained, under the various Reserve Forces Acts from 1882 to 1907, and unless the Dail chose to repeal this commitment they would remain as subject to Imperial law as any mainland counterpart, and be liable for permanent service in an emergency, annual training and normal punishment for desertion.⁵⁵

The obvious problem that independence would raise had not been lost on the War Office, and within days of the Treaty being signed it had put the question of what was to be done with reservists to the newly formed Provisional Government of Ireland Committee (P.G.I.).⁵⁶ In response, the Technical Sub-Committee of the P.G.I. put forward its views for possible Cabinet consideration in March 1922, outlining the difficulty and 'wasteful' effort of trying to retain reservists when the British authorities would soon have no actual power to prosecute those who did not respond

to the call. It is notable, moreover, that even at this early stage the Technical Committee had begun to ponder a singular dilemma that would arise when Ireland became a Dominion proper. It was noted that as a matter of practicality it was present policy to discharge any reservist who left Britain for the Dominions, the implication being that while in geographic terms the Irish reservists would still be close at hand, they could hardly be treated any differently.⁵⁷ Decision was deferred for three months pending negotiations, but it seems that it was not until November that the Viceregal Lodge first made informal contact with Mulcahy, and then only on behalf of the Admiralty. If this tentative approach suggested that London was expecting stiff opposition, then they were in for a surprise: the Colonial Office was informed that the coming Free State government 'would certainly recognise' the priority of the Imperial government in the event of any naval mobilisation. More to the point, the Colonial Office was invited to take up the whole question on a formal basis with Dublin.⁵⁸

This subject was to bring a unique twist to defence relations in the 1920s, being the one area where the Provisional and Free State governments gave active, if qualified, support, and where it was the British departments that began to delay and see intractable problems. At least, that is, the Colonial Office and War Office saw problems: the Admiralty appears to have believed that all would be business as usual, and it was on this subject, in December 1922, that an irritated Colonial Office official noted: 'The Adm like some other Depts has not yet grasped that the F.S. is now a Dominion.'⁵⁹ The War Office, however, was only too aware of this fact, and its Permanent Under-Secretary, H.J.Creedy, let it be known that there was little point

in having men liable for military service if the only way to ensure this was through a total dependence on the Free State. He wanted the entire question held over unless the Imperial Parliament intended to legislate. The clear intimation was that the War Office was willing to discharge all its Free State reservists rather than risk a future humiliation at the hands of a so-called Dominion.⁶⁰

It should be noted that the question of numbers and finance did not really enter these existing, or future, calculations. There were some 2,300 Army reservists, whose total training costs (to be paid by Britain) were £40,000 per annum, and less than 100 members of the Royal Fleet Reserve.⁶¹ To Loughnane, who replaced Andy Cope in Dublin, the question was about finding an avenue which promised to lead to co-operation and future partnership, and he grew frustrated when he heard of the War Office's doubts. In February 1923 he suggested that it would be 'very unfortunate indeed' if reservists were discharged, and urged the Colonial Office to press 'strongly' in order to prevent the War Office drifting.⁶²

But the question did drift, and it was not until August that the Colonial Office made a formal approach. Possibly because of the encouraging signals already received, the inquiry was notably open and disarming, and it confessed that future progress would be totally dependent upon the 'goodwill and co-operation' of Free State ministers. On the British side the immediate problem was seen as procedural, and it was requested that the Irish might like to duplicate, for the benefit of naval reservists, the management system previously operated by the Irish Boards of Trade and Customs and Excise.⁶³ But, having received all the right signals, and having calmed their own

fears, it was now that the British were embarrassed by a wall of Irish silence. In November a reminder commented on the 'considerable inconvenience' being caused by the lack of a reply, and by May 1924 the continuing silence produced the remark that it was 'unnecessary ... to dwell at length upon the embarrassment occasioned to the Admiralty and War Office by the absence of any understanding on the subject'.⁶⁴ In fact, there was little need to inquire of the reasons for this silence; the growing rebellion within the Free State's own Army had become all consuming, and as previously mentioned, the court case involving a confessed British deserter, in October 1923, began to highlight the legal and political minefield that the Attorney General's office and the Department of Defence might enter once commitment had been given in this related area.⁶⁵ There was every reason why the former would need time to appraise the Free State's apparently fragile legal responsibility, under Article 73 of the Constitution (see Appendix 2), and to assess the politics of promoting the more binding legislation which the Colonial Office was keen to advise upon.⁶⁶ As in the case of deserters, there was a difference between seeing the British point of view and actually legislating for it.

In this instance, however, there was every indication that, within the existing framework, the Irish government wanted to continue an agreement without first extracting major concessions, a position evidenced by the support given at an Executive Council meeting in November 1923, and by the formal reply which was finally elicited in May 1924. The Free State would be prepared to duplicate the necessary administrative machinery, and would be prepared to arrest and hand over recalcitrants to the relevant British authorities. In return, all that was asked was that

any reservist be given the option, by notice, of resigning, and that naval reservists would be allowed to be 'absorbed' within any Irish Coastal Defence Force that might result from the scheduled Article 6 conference in 1926.⁶⁷ In all, this has to be seen as a reasonable, if calculated, reply, despite the added advice that new legislation to cover these points was not being contemplated.

This reply was almost guaranteed to have at least two contrasting responses in London, neither of which directly addressed the possibility that it might be based on proper self interest and a completely independent future. The Colonial Office was almost bound to seize on the positive aspects of Irish goodwill, as an aid to Dominion development and harmony, and the Admiralty was equally bound to stand aghast at the implications for its own strategic control. For the remainder of 1924, however, little happened excepting that the War Office, for its part, wanted it known that it had taken heart from the Irish proposals; despite lingering reservations, the Army Council noted 'with much satisfaction the willingness ... to assist them'. There was of course no suggestion that the Army reserve should one day be absorbed within the Free State Army.⁶⁸

But if the War Office attitude was no longer a problem, it seems that until Leo Amery took charge, the Colonial Office fought shy of provoking an Admiralty reaction. When this came, at the beginning of 1925, it was much as expected: the Colonial Office was advised that the idea of the Irish absorbing naval reservists after five years 'would give rise to considerable administrative difficulties', and that it would be better to let the small numbers involved 'die out, and to postpone the

