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'Natural outpost to Britain's defences': a study of the Irish Treaty Ports. 1914-1945

PhD Thesis

2013

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Abstract

The thesis is a general profile of the ports in the period from the beginning of the First World War to the end of the Second World War, under a number of headings, but it retains the ports as the central topic. The seven years before and after they became known as the Treaty Ports are included because one objective of the thesis is to gain an understanding of why Britain attached such importance to them; believed them to be an integral part of the defence of the empire; and why they became the focus of Irish political objectives in the later 1930s. These topics are examined as they affected political decisions throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In the 1921 negotiations it was inconceivable to British political and military leaders that Britain would not retain control over the Treaty Ports and their exclusive right to sea defences, even in the new Irish territorial waters. This belief continued throughout the 1920s until the late 1930s when de Valera's continual efforts to have the ports returned resulted in them being vacated by the British in 1938. By this time, war with Germany was almost inevitable, and the loss of the ports and military facilities in Éire was seen to create a dangerous hole in Britain's defences.

During the Irish Civil War, the Royal Navy played a more active role than is generally realised and the extent of these activities is the subject of a separate chapter

Another aspect of the Treaty Ports that is considered is the relationship that existed between local people within the ports' areas and the military and naval personnel based in and associated with the ports. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, British soldiers were to be seen in uniform, sometimes armed, in Free State territory while carrying out their normal duties and British sailors, also in uniform, were a frequent sight in the vicinities of the ports and occasionally at other ports around the country. The attitude of the local population to these episodes is examined, not only in the 1920s and 1930s but also from the First World War when thousands of American and British sailors were based in Queenstown and Berehaven.

The thesis also examines the legal aspects of manning and operating the forts, matters that were notably non-specific in the wording of the treaty. These include matters such as the legal status of the ports, the army, and the navy operating in and on Irish territorial waters and land; how the daily life of operating as active military and naval forces was managed; how arms and munitions were to be transported across Irish territorial land between the forts. The thesis examines how these and other related issues were dealt with by the authorities and by those who were locally involved.

De Valera's efforts to have the ports returned to Irish control from the time he came to power in 1932 are also explored, and why he believed this to be vital to Éire's longer-time interests. Finally, the thesis examines the consequences of the ports being returned in 1938 and Irish government choosing to remain neutral during the Second World War and denying the Allies access to the ports and other defence facilities in Éire.

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Signed

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Most of all though, it is to my wife, Pauline, that I am most deeply indebted. Since I started on this journey, she has tolerated my sometimes eremitish existence with good humour, and probably with a degree of bemusement, but whose support has never once faltered in ten years.

Note on citations

Citations referring to Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann debates are taken from the Houses of the Oireachtas website http://debates.oireachtas.ie.

Citations referring to House of Commons and House of Lords debates are taken from the Hansard records at http://hansard.millbanksystems.com.

Where the repository for the Chief Secretary's files is cited as the National Archives of Ireland, it should be noted that this refers to the microfilm copies that are held there. Where The National Archives, Kew, is cited, this refers to the original files that are held there.

Citations referring to The National Archives, Kew, are quoted without indicating whether they were sourced on site or from the archive's website http://nationalarchives.gov.uk. The great majority of references were sourced at Kew but many of these have become available online since research on this thesis commenced.

Abbreviations

BMH	Bureau of Military History, Military Archives, Dublin.
CAC	Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge University.
CCA	Cork County Archives
CID	Committee on Imperial Defence
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
CNS	Chief of Naval Staff
CO	Colonial Office
COS	Chiefs of Staff
DCOS	Deputy Chiefs of Staff
DIFP	Documents on Irish Foreign Policy
DNI	Department of Naval Intelligence
DO	Dominions Office
FLA	First Lord of the Admiralty
FSL	First Sea Lord
GOC	General Officer Commanding
HDC	Home Defence Committee
HPDC	Home Ports Defence Committee
IFS	Irish Free State
ISC	Irish Situation Committee
IWM	Imperial War Museum
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JIS	Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee
JPS	Joint Planning Sub-Committee (later Joint Planning Staff)
KCL	King's College London
M	M[ilitary] Branch, Admiralty
M	M[ilitary] Branch, Admiralty
MA	Military Archives [Ireland]
NAI	National Archives of Ireland
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration, Washington
NHC	Naval Historical Collection, Naval War College, Newport, R.I.
NLI	National Library of Ireland
RA	Royal Artillery
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAM	Royal Artillery Museum, Woolwich.
RCS	Royal Corps of Signals

RFC	Royal Flying Corps
RGA	Royal Garrison Artillery
RMC	Royal Medical Corps
RN	Royal Navy
RNAS	Royal Naval Air Service
RNR	Royal Naval Reserve
RSC	Royal Service Corps
SICD	South of Ireland Coast Defence
TNA	The National Archives, Kew.
UCDA	UCD Archives
USAF	United States Air Force
USAMHI	United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA.
USN	United States Navy
USNAS	United States Naval Air Service

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Introduction

Under the terms of the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty Britain retained the exclusive right over the defence by sea of Britain and Ireland, and over the harbour defences of Queenstown (now Cobh), Berehaven, and Lough Swilly. This meant that that the Royal Navy patrolled Irish territorial waters and could anchor in the specified harbours under the protection of the forts, manned by the British Army, that provided the harbour defences. The three harbours, which became known as the Treaty Ports, have featured in most studies of the history of the Irish Free State ever since. However, almost invariably in these studies, the ports are not the main subject under discussion but are just one element in a wider political history of the time.[1] In many of these studies the ports only crop up in discussions on the periods 1921-23 and 1937-40, otherwise, they are overlooked.

This thesis is a study of the ports in the period from the beginning of the First World War to the end of the Second World War, under a number of headings, but it retains the ports as the central topic. It explores aspects of the ports that have received little attention in the literature. Among these are: life within the forts and how the military operated in the changed political circumstances; how local people reacted to them; how the Royal Navy operated

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[1] Frank Pakenham, *Peace by ordeal: an account from first-hand sourcesof the negotiations and signature of the Anglo-Irish agreement of 1921* (3rd. edn. London, 1962); Jason K. Knirck, *Imagining Ireland's independence: the debates over the Anglo-Irish agreement 1921* (Lanham, Maryland, 2006) focuses on the treaty negotiations and include the ports as part of those negotiations; Paul Canning, *British policy towards Ireland,* deals with the ports as part of both the 1921 negotiations and the 1938 negotiations leading to their return; Kennedy, *Guarding neutral Ireland,* includes the ports as part of a history of the coast watching service and assesses what their value they might have been to the Allies during World War Two; Deirdre McMahon, *Republicans and imperialists: Anglo-Irish relations in the 1930s* (New Haven, 1984) shows the ports as a recurring issue in her analysis of Anglo-Irish relations during the 1930s; Brian Girvin, *The emergency: neutral Ireland 1939-45)* and Eunan O'Halpin, *Spying on Ireland: British intelligence and Irish neutrality during the Second World War* (Oxford, 2008) and *Defending neutral Ireland: the Irish state and its enemies since 1922* (Oxford, 1999), and T. Ryle Dwyer, *Behind the green curtain: Ireland's phoney neutrality during World War Two* (Dublin, 2009) deal with the ports as they affected Ireland's policy of neutrality; Clair Wills, *That neutral island: a cultural history of Ireland during the Second World War* (London, 2007) also deals with the ports with regard to their political consequences for neutrality in her wider assessment of the implications of neutrality on the cultural and social life of Irish people; Paul McMahon, *British spies and Irish rebels: British intelligence and Ireland 1916-1945* (Woodbridge, 2008) and O'Halpin, *Spying on Ireland,* refer to the ports as part of their accounts of British and Irish intelligence; Joseph Carroll, *Ireland in the war years* (Newton Abbott, 1975), Trevor Allen, *The storm passed by: Ireland and the Battle of the Atlantic* (Dublin, 1996), and Ian S. Wood, *Ireland during the Second World War* (London, 2002) deal with the ports with reference to World War II.

in Irish territorial waters, and how the new Irish state dealt with the presence of British army and naval forces as it developed its own defences. The technical aspects of the structure of the forts and their equipment are covered only superficially. Comprehensive technical information has been published on the range and type of guns and equipment in each fort; the structures and layouts of individual batteries and their operating procedure, so this will not be repeated here.[2]

It is necessary to include the seven years before and after they became known as the Treaty Ports because an overriding theme of the thesis is to gain an understanding of why Britain attached such importance to them; believed them to be an integral part of the defence of the empire; and why they were convinced that their non-availability during the Second World War had serious consequences for Britain's losses in the Atlantic war. Extensive use is made of British sources to understand why British political and military leaders believed as they did, and the reasons why they finally did agree to the ports being returned. The thesis also explores how, in the later 1930s, the ports assumed a higher significance than before in Irish political circles and how their return became the focus of Irish political objectives.

For a treaty that was so sensitive for both sides, the actual Articles of Agreement were surprisingly brief and, with regard to the legal aspects of manning and operating the forts, were notably non-specific. For instance, the wording of the treaty omits to specify matters such as the legal status of the ports, the army, and the navy operating in and on Irish territorial waters and land; how the daily life of operating as active military and naval forces was managed; how arms and munitions were to be transported across Irish territorial land between the forts. Existing historiography does not show how these matters were dealt with at local or at inter-governmental level. The thesis reveals the degree of co-operation that did exist between the two governments in

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[2] Bill Clements, *Defending the North: the fortifications of Ulster 1796-1956* (Newtownards, 2003); John Harnett McEnery, *Fortress Ireland: the story of the Irish coastal forts and the River Shannon defence line* (Dublin, 2006).; Paul M. Kerrigan, *Castles and fortifications in Ireland 1445-1945* (Cork, 1995); Col. K.W. Maurice-Jones, *The history of coast artillery in the British army* (London, 1959); David Moore, *Arming the forts: the artillery of the Victorian land forts* (London, 1994); Andrew, Saunders, *Fortress Britain: Artillery fortifications in the British Isles and Ireland* (Liphook, 1989); Ian Stevenson, 'The two treaty ports and the one that never was' in *Fortress* (London, 1992). Two excellent internet sites are: *The Palmerston Forts Society* (www.palmerstonfortssociety.org.uk), and *Victorian Forts and Artillery* (www.victorianforts.co.uk).

overcoming the difficulties that were encountered by British and Irish military and civilian personnel in the course of their daily activities. Most of these difficulties were resolved by the Executive Council of the Irish Free State adopting a pragmatic approach towards them, rather than by escalating them to a level where ideology would have become a factor, making the problems more intractable. These incidents also provide an insight into the generally good relationships that existed between the two governments throughout the 1920s and early 1930s.

Another aspect of the Treaty Ports that is examined is the relationship that existed between local people within the ports' areas and the military and naval personnel based in and associated with the ports. Probably the most interesting feature to emerge is the degree of tolerance by the local populations towards the forts from 1922, and their acceptance of the presence of British army and navy personnel in their areas. No doubt some of the acceptance was inspired by a recognition of the benefit to local business and the community in general, but it was also inspired by many families having a long-time relationship with the British army and navy through family members having served in the forces. The attitude of the local population to these episodes is examined, not only in the 1920s and 1930s but also from the First World War when thousands of American and British sailors were based in Queenstown and Berehaven.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, British soldiers were to be seen in uniform, sometimes armed, in Irish Free State territory while carrying out their normal duties and British sailors, also in uniform, were a frequent sight in the vicinities of the ports and occasionally at other ports around the country. This tolerance towards British servicemen is confirmed by there being evidence of only one serious attack on British army personnel after 1922.

The one attack against army personnel occurred in Cobh in 1924. It was an attack on British soldiers and civilians as they were disembarking from a military launch and it received international attention. Archival records of the incident are quite comprehensive and as the incident received so much attention, and because it was such an isolated incident, it is accorded a chapter on its own.

In the inter-war years, Royal Navy destroyers patrolled in Irish territorial waters, mainly along the southern and western coasts and were familiar sights not only in Cobh and Berehaven but also in coastal towns like Waterford,

Bantry, Youghal, Galway, Killary, and Foynes. The vessels and crews were invariably made welcome when they arrived, and the thesis uncovers evidence of the efforts made by some local communities for Royal Navy warships to visit their towns in the 1930s. Visits to Lough Swilly by destroyers were much more infrequent, especially in the 1930s, but one destroyer, based in Belfast, did have responsibility for patrolling the northern coast.

A great deal is known about the material aid that was given to the Irish National Army by the British government, through the War Office, during the Civil War. However, little has been written about the role played by the Royal Navy during this conflict. An examination of the weekly reports of destroyer commanders at the time reveals how the navy was far from being a disinterested observer to the conflict, and it shows how several naval destroyers played an active part in assisting National Army troops in conflicts along the south-west coast against anti-treaty forces, or 'Irregulars' as they came to be known.

A separate chapter is devoted to defence planning in Ireland by both governments in the 1920s. Under the terms of the treaty it was agreed that its defence clauses would be reviewed by both governments after five years. The military commands of both countries prepared plans in preparation for the review but because of a lack of urgency by both governments, the review never took place. It suited the British government for the status quo to remain, but the Irish government's lack of zeal in progressing the matter meant that they lost out on an opportunity of regaining some naval sovereignty and of developing an Irish naval service and fishing industry.

In the 1921 negotiations it was inconceivable to British political and military leaders that Britain would not retain control over the Treaty Ports and their exclusive right to sea defences, even in the new Irish territorial waters. The thesis considers the validity of this belief which continued until the late 1930s when de Valera's continual efforts to have the ports returned were successful and resulted in their being vacated by the British in 1938. By this time, war with Germany was almost inevitable, and the loss of the ports and military facilities in Éire was seen to create a dangerous hole in Britain's defences. The thesis also shows how, and why, by the mid-1930s, technological advances had brought about a change in emphasis by the British of their defence needs in Ireland. No longer talking about the need for 'the Treaty Ports' or, more colloquially, 'the ports', the emphasis changed to 'facilities' in Ireland for defence needs. Lord Caldecote (formerly Sir Thomas Inskip), the Dominions Secretary,

took up this very point in 1940 when he stated: 'We talk of ports; that is a generic term.'[3]

The thesis is not concerned with the rights or wrongs of Irish neutrality in the context of the treaty ports. That is a topic that has been, and continues to be, well-aired.[4] What has not been so well-aired are the reasons why Britain continued to place such importance on retaining control over the defences of the ports and the seas around Ireland before and after the First World War and for the first three years of the Second World War. Churchill has been painted as a *bête noir* character because of his unrelenting and sometimes intemperate comments about what he saw as Britain's betrayal by Chamberlain, de Valera, and others who he blamed for Britain's defences being compromised by British forces being denied access to the ports during the Second World War. Churchill's comments in this regard have been shown to be unsustainable, but they do reflect how exposed British military and political figures felt by being denied access to defence facilities in Ireland.

For the seventeen years of their existence, the Treaty Ports were an anomaly in the claim of the new Irish Free State to be an independent state. As long as Britain maintained a military presence in the state, and controlled the sea defences around it, the claim to independence was going to be compromised. This did not end until the ports were vacated in 1938, but the ensuing world war ensured that the issue of sovereignty and neutrality did not vanish. On one side it exposed Ireland to the charge that it relied on Britain and the Allies to provide its only defence against Germany and expected British ships and sailors to run the gauntlet of U-boats to bring fuel and supplies across the Atlantic to Ireland while refusing to provide any assistance towards protecting those same ships and men. On the other, it was an opportunity to demonstrate, on a world stage, the reality of the independence of the country, for the first time in hundreds of years, and its right to make political decisions in its own interest without regard to any other country. The morality of these issues is not considered in any detail but what is finally examined is whether or

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[3] Caldecote, cabinet memorandum, 'Necessity for naval bases in Éire', 19 Mar. 1940 (TNA, CAB 66/15/37.
[4] O'Halpin, *Spying on Ireland*; Girvin, *The emergency: neutral Ireland 1939-45*; Dwyer, *Behind the green curtain*; Wills, *That neutral island*; Brian Girvin and Geoffrey Roberts (eds.), *Ireland and the Second World War:politics society and remembrance* (Dublin, 2000); Dermot Keogh, *Ireland and Europe, 1919-1989: a diplomatic and political history* (Dublin, 1989); Robert Fisk, *In time of war: Ireland, Ulster and the price of neutrality, 1939-1945* (Dublin, 1983).

not the loss of the ports and facilities made any material difference to the Allies' efforts in the war and if lives and shipping would have been saved if the Allies had been granted facilities on Ireland's west coast.

While the Treaty Ports were an anomaly in the Irish Free State, the thesis shows they were always going to be an inevitable outcome of negotiations on Irish independence. Britain's belief in its need to have naval defences on Ireland's Atlantic coastline was too deep-rooted for an agreement ever to be reached that would entail the immediate evacuation of its bases in the new Irish Free State. The belief did not emanate from the First World War, it preceded it by several hundred years, years in which the strategic importance of Ireland's location had always been recognised by military strategists.

Adm A.T.Mahan stated somewhere that Cuba was the most important strategic island in the world after Ireland...The importance of Ireland has been obvious to international statesmen for centuries, but not usually appreciated even by students of Irish history.

Comdt. Dan Bryan

1. Strategic considerations: the need for the defended ports

Britain's wars with France from the late eighteenth century highlighted the strategic importance of Ireland's geographical location to the defence of Britain; important enough to be the main reason why William Pitt strove for Ireland to become an integral part of Great Britain under a new United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. A semi-independent Ireland, under a parliament with legislative independence acquired in 1782, sited on Britain's western flank, was always going to be the Achilles heel in its defences. Without absolute control over Ireland, it meant that Britain no longer had direct and full control over its western defences. Furthermore, under the terms of Ireland's new independence, Britain could mobilise its forces in Ireland only through a parliament in Dublin that might not always be attuned to Britain's wishes. It has been argued that 'throughout the 1790s the threat posed by Ireland to an empire at war was always a consideration in Pitt's imperial thinking. Security was his overriding imperative...'[1] Indeed, successive British governments acted on the belief that control over Ireland was an essential part of Britain's defences and that, as has been argued, 'union with Ireland was grounded on British strategic necessities.'[2]

The threat to Britain's security became a reality in 1796 when the French attempted invasion of Ireland through Bantry Bay, under General Hoche, and with Wolfe Tone on board, was close to being successful. Again, in 1798, another small French force under General Humbert was successful in landing at Killala but was subsequently overpowered. Yet another unsuccessful French invasion was attempted a few weeks later in Lough Swilly.

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[1] Patrick Geoghegan, 'The making of the union' in Daire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (eds.), *Acts of Union: the cause, contexts and the consequences of the Act of Union* (Dublin, 2001), p. 34.
[2] Charles Townshend, *The British campaign in Ireland 1919-1921* (Oxford, 1975), p. 201.

A succession of coastal defence forts had been built, and fell into disuse, from the mid-fifteenth century. They were of varying sizes and quality but were built without any obvious co-ordinated plan. The first of a new generation of solidly-built structures, using military engineering, was Charles Fort, built at Kinsale in the mid-seventeenth century. Others followed around Cork Harbour, notably on Spike Island, Haulbowline, and Oyster Haven. They all gradually fell into neglect by the end of the eighteenth century, and after the failed French invasion of 1796 it was realised how vulnerable Ireland, and therefore Britain, was to attack by France. The army chief engineer, Major General Charles Vallency, advised the Lord Lieutenant, Camden, that if the French had landed successfully in Bantry Bay they would have proceeded to take the Cork forts and Charles Fort, because they were not adequately defended from a landward attack.[3] While the Irish parliament recognised the weakness in defence, they did not have the money to upgrade them to the required standard. It was not until the Act of Union in 1801 when the Board of Ordnance in London took over the administration of Irish coastal defence from the local board in Ireland that the money was made available to carry out an extensive upgrading of the port defences in Cork harbour, Berehaven, and Lough Swilly.[4] In addition, a large number of war signal stations were built around the country's coastline, each station being visible to the station on either side. These were square-shaped, two-storey buildings that were accessible by ladder through an entrance at first-floor level. These were under Admiralty control and were manned by the Royal Navy.[5]

The Admiralty had appreciated the growing strategic importance of Ireland's coastline, and in 1793 created an independent command, based in Kinsale, of all British coastal forces in Ireland.

Both Bantry Bay and Lough Swilly were chosen by the French as invasion points for the same reason that they became of vital importance to Britain's defences in World War One: they were extensive deep-water harbours, situated at the perimeter of the western approaches to Britain that gave safe haven to large numbers of warships. Without control over these

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[3] McEnery, *Fortress Ireland:* pp 45-6.
[4] Ibid., pp 53-54.
[5] For detailed information about the signal stations see Kerrigan, *Castles and fortifications in Ireland, 1485-1945.*

seaways British security would have been seriously compromised. The First Lord of the Admiralty at the time of the Anglo-Irish treaty negotiations, Lord Lee of Fareham, summarised the navy's views:

> Great Britain lives by sea-borne food; her communications depend upon the freedom of the great sea routes. Ireland lies at Britain's side across the seaways north and south that link her with the sister nations of the Empire, the markets of the world and the vital sources of her food supply. In recognition of this fact, which nature has imposed and no statesmanship can change, it is essential that the Royal Navy alone should control the seas around Ireland and Great Britain.[6]

Britain's wealth and power were dependent on safe lines of communication with the empire for its vast mercantile marine. This, in turn, required an equally vast navy to provide the safety through its control of the high seas. Both bodies were interdependent: one could not exist without the other; the mercantile marine generated the finance to fund the navy, the navy provided safe passage that enabled the mercantile marine keep the finance flowing. This was a truism that was understood even by the General Staff of the National Army in 1925-6 when it made recommendations to the Executive Council on the composition of a proposed Irish naval force for the defence of the Irish coast, advising that 'it was impossible to maintain any kind of navy without a proportionate mercantile marine and that similarly no mercantile marine has ever survived the stress of war without a proportionate navy to protect it'.[7]

The importance of geography to Britain's defences was highlighted in 1902 by Sir Halford Mackinder, a founding figure in geopolitics, (a term he did not use – he referred to 'strategic geography'). His hypothesis was that in a war with say, France, Britain's control of the seas would have the effect of carrying Britain's frontier to the coast of France, making Britain safe from invasion by sea and, at the same time, making France liable to it.[8] On the

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[6] Memorandum by First Lord of the Admiralty, 16 Sept. 1921 (TNA, CAB 24/128).

[7] General Staff memorandum 'Coast defence (sea)', 1926 (MA, CDA/5; CDA /15). The numbering of Coastal Defence files in the Military Archives has been changed and there are inconsistencies between the catalogue numbers and the numbers on some of the files. In order to avoid confusion, all such citations will refer to the old file number first, followed by the new number. It is possible to identify files from either number.

[8] Halford Mackinder, 'Britain and the British seas', in Halford Mackinder (ed.), *The regions of the world* (London, 1902), p. 310, (www.archive.org.) (30 Jun 2009).

other hand, were France to control the seas, then all of Britain's coast would be open to attack and would need to be defended against invasion.

Britain, traditionally, went to almost any lengths to protect its interests at sea. Its dealings with neutral countries when these interests were under threat were demonstrated in 1807 by the decision of the government, under George Canning, to send a strong naval force to bombard the city and population of Copenhagen, the capital of a neutral country, and to capture its fleet of warships out of fear that Bonaparte might decide to take it first and be in a position to block Britain's access to the Baltic. Lord Palmerston, then a young MP, made such a strong speech in the House in support of the pre-emptive strike that he was appointed Secretary at War soon afterwards. His argument summarised Britain's defence policy: any neutral country considered by Britain to be too weak to defend itself from attack by an enemy of Britain, and that refused to take Britain's side in a war against that enemy, was a legitimate target of attack by Britain.[9] The point was also made by Lloyd George early in the treaty negotiations in 1921 when he stated that theoretical neutrality did not give an assurance of security because 'in war guarantees of neutrality vanish, vanish.'[10] The principle is an important one, because in later years it was to underlie Churchill's argument for taking the treaty ports by force if de Valera refused him permission to use them, and to have the War Office draw up plans for such an eventuality, although the War Office never considered that such an option was a serious possibility. A strong military power had no compunction about ignoring the rights of a small neutral country if it suited their interests – a point well understood by Britain in the 1922 treaty negotiations when it insisted that Ireland could not be allowed to adopt neutrality if Britain was to feel safe from attack.

Mackinder describes how Britain's chief naval bases lay within the metropolitan area of London and the south coast, while the only important

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[9] Lord Palmerston, Hansard 1 (Commons), 3 Sept. 1808, x, c. 300. George Henry Francis's account of Palmerston's speech is more expressive than the Hansard account: 'England, according to the law of self-preservation which is a fundamental principle of the law of nations, is justified in securing, and therefore enforcing, from Denmark a neutrality which France would by compulsion have converted into hostility'. In George Henry Francis, *Opinions and policy of the Right Honourable Viscount Palmerston* (London, 1852), p. 3.

[10] Pakenham., *Peace by ordea*, p. 148.

dockyards beyond this area were Queenstown and Pembroke.[11] This concentration ensured that the coast of south England was well protected, leaving Queenstown and Pembroke to take care of the south-western approaches and the Irish sea, and also leaving the great ship-building yards in the north of England and Scotland freer of strategic considerations. Mackinder also describes how the Atlantic coast of Ireland was a vital element in Britain's defences. Apart from the numerous harbours that provided shelter – Lough Swilly, Lough Foyle, Blacksod and Clew Bays, Dingle Bay, Kenmare River, and Bantry bay – and where gunnery and seamanship exercises could be held clear of commercial shipping lanes, he contended that if Britain were to lose control of the seas, these havens could 'become nests of hostile cruisers'.[12] It has been suggested recently that Mackinder's theory can be more fully appreciated by focussing on Britain and Ireland as one geographical and political unit, and visualising it as a triangle extending from the Orkneys to the Fastnet, then to the Thames estuary, and then back to the Orkneys. The Orkneys to Fastnet line, including the treaty ports, was the critical line on the high seas on which Britain's defences lay.[13]

Another great naval geostrategist in the late nineteenth century, Admiral A.T. Mahan of the US Navy, who was renowned even in the Royal Navy for his views on naval warfare, was also aware of how important Ireland was strategically. Mahan believed Cuba to be a country that was of vital strategic importance to the USA but he is also reported as categorising it as 'the island of greatest importance in the world *after* Ireland' (italics added).[14]

The Royal Navy had always held the major role in providing the defence for Britain and its trade routes, so it is natural that it would have a greater appreciation of the significance of the strategic importance of Ireland's geographical location and, consequently, a greater input than the other armed services into national defence policy in the twentieth century. Control over these seaways was essential not only for the defence of Britain but also for its empire because, as was the case in World War One, in addition to Britain's

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[11] Mackinder, 'Britain and the British seas', p. 312.
[12] Ibid., p. 321.
[13] Michael Kennedy, 'The treaty ports as a geopolitical and international relations issue', paper read at *Treaty Ports Conference*, UCC, 29 Nov. 2008.
[14] Col Dan Bryan, Manuscript of article based on a lecture 'The historic international military importance of Ireland', 1962 (UCD Archives, P 71/258).

food and raw material supplies being threatened, there was also the problem of British and French troops in the Mediterranean who had to be supplied with drafts of fresh men, guns, ammunition, and equipment, as was emphasised by Vice Admiral Bayly, Commander-in-Chief in Queenstown during the war.[15] The ill-fated Irish Convention had come to the same conclusion with its resolution that it

> accepted unreservedly the Admiralty's view that for the purpose of naval defence Ireland must be considered as integrally connected with Great Britain, and defence must therefore be by one force under one control.[16]

The Admiralty had always held this view. Its reasoning was made clear to the Irish delegates during the treaty negotiations:

> Ireland, by reason of her geographical position covering the most important sea approaches to the British Isles is a natural outpost to Britain's defences' and that 'from a strategic point of view...an integral portion of the British Isles.[17]

The Admiralty's view was reinforced by its experience in the First World War, a war in which the submarine played such a crucial role, a point that was reiterated by Lord Beatty at the first sub-conference on defence during the treaty negotiations.[18] Britain came very close to losing the war by April 1917, and if the treaty ports had not been available to the navy at the time, the outcome would have been quite different. The ports were essential to the navy's ultimate success over the U-boat so it is not surprising that they influenced the Admiralty's expectations of what form a future war would take. In the light of its experiences of the value of Queenstown, Berehaven, and Lough Swilly in World War One the Admiralty was determined to ensure retention of its right of control over, or at least a right of access to, these and other facilities around Ireland in any form of Home Rule settlement.

The Admiralty had made its recommendations on naval defence in a cabinet memorandum (C.P. 3310) on 16 September 1921. This laid out the Admiralty's position on the importance of retaining complete control over sea and coastal defence in Irish waters. Among its recommendations were:

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[15] Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly, *Pull together: the memoirs of Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly* (London, 1939), p. 215

[16] Memorandum by Chief Secretary, 2 April 1918 (TNA, CAB 24/47).

[17] Remarks by naval staff on the memorandum by the Irish representatives, 18 Oct. 1921 (TNA, ADM 1/8612/175).

[18] Minutes of sub-conference, 13 Oct. 1921 (TNA, CAB 21/245).

> The Royal Navy be accorded all rights and privileges by the Irish state that it considered essential for naval purposes in Irish harbours and on the Irish coast.
> The Royal Navy to be exclusively responsible for naval defence.
> No new naval force or armed vessels to be permitted to the new Irish state.
> The British government to have total control over all cables, wireless stations, navigation aids, lighthouses.[19]

The memorandum was discussed by the General Staff and they drew attention to some matters that had not been covered by the Admiralty. They highlighted how the naval bases on the Irish coast would be of no use to the navy in wartime unless they were adequately defended from attack, whether from land or sea. Even assuming that the responsibility for defence from land attack would rest with the Irish authorities, they pointed out that defence from sea attack was a joint naval, military, and air force responsibility; that these defences would be required from the first day of mobilisation; and so they must be armed and manned even during peacetime. What they were saying, in effect, was that the forts must continue to be manned by British personnel—although they added a proviso that this should continue 'until such time as it is quite clear that Ireland herself can provide the highly skilled personnel required for the purpose.'[20]

The Admiralty took note of these comments and submitted an additional memorandum (C.P. 3409) 'in amplification of memorandum C.P. 3310' that specifically addressed its needs in relation to the defended ports.[21] They restated their belief that, in peacetime, the ports' defences should remain under British control and that the Admiralty should retain their property and rights at Berehaven and mooring buoys at Queenstown. They advocated disposing of their oil storage facilities at Haulbowline and Rathmullen, all coastguard and war signal stations, and all other Admiralty property in Ireland. However, the sting was in the tail: the Admiralty was to have the right in wartime 'to acquire possession of any of their former properties and any additional sites or buildings which are deemed necessary...and to be assured of full and undivided control over Irish waters.'[22] The Home Ports Defence

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[19] Memorandum by First Lord of the Admiralty, 16 Sept. 1921 (TNA, CAB 24/128).
[20] Memorandum by Worthington-Evans, 3 Oct. 1921 (TNA, ADM 1/8612/175).
[21] Memorandum by First Lord of the Admiralty, 16 Sept. 1921 (TNA, CAB 24/129).
[22] Ibid.

Committee had actually discussed the possibility of upgrading the storage facilities at Rathmullen nine months earlier and at a meeting on 15 October 1920 the same committee (that included Captain Domvile, who was an advisor to the British negotiators on defence) decided that a new proposed site at Rathmullen be purchased to allow for 140,000 tons of fuel oil to be stored in twenty six tanks. However, this was not to be progressed until 'conditions in Ireland had so improved as to justify this being done without fear of damage to the installation.'[23]

While the General Staff were emphatic that the scale of defence should continue to be determined by the Committee of Imperial Defence, and that this be accepted by an Irish government, they did not discuss contingency plans in the event of reinforcements being needed for defence from land attack. Neither do they appear to have given any thought to the adequacy of this defence in the event of the Irish Free State greatly reducing its army.

The General Staff did include the RAF as having some responsibility for air coastal defence but they did not make any other specific reference to it, so it can be assumed that the likelihood of this happening was still considered to be remote. Air power at this time was not considered to be of any great strategic importance. This is reflected in the articles of agreement in the treaty in which the British sought and were accorded no more than the vague and limited 'facilities in the neighbourhood of the above ports for coastal defence by air.'[24] The RAF recognised the limitations of aircraft at the time and that their full effectiveness would not be felt until aircraft had the capacity to fly considerably longer distances and to remain in the air for much longer periods.[25]

Aircraft were still relatively flimsy constructions, of no great power, and with little long-range capability and were not seen to have had a major impact on the course of the war. Even Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery, writing three years after the war, was of this view and he could not see how air power could have been of any great benefit. His view of aeroplanes was that

> they were really of no use to us, except as a quick and safe means of getting from one place to another. Even then the

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[23] Minutes of CID Home Ports Defence committee, 29 June 1920 and 15 Oct. 1920 (TNA, CAB 12/1).
[24] Annex 1 (5), Articles of Agreement of the Anglo-Irish treaty.
[25] Chief of Air Staff, memorandum on air power requirements, Dec. 1921 (TNA, CAB 24/71).

> landing grounds were few and far between. The pilots and observers knew nothing whatever about the war, on the conditions under which it was being fought, and were not therefore in a position to be able to help much.[26]

The Air Staff had a clearer view of the potential for aircraft three years earlier, in 1918, when they made their recommendations on air power requirements for the post-war period. They recognised that with improvements in aircraft design both Britain and Ireland would be open to air attack in the coming years and that much of the coastal defence work that was the responsibility of the Royal Navy would be taken over by the RAF. Their specific advice at the time was that six squadrons be based around Dublin (three in Tallaght, one in Collinstown, and two in Gormanstown) and that kite balloon stations be established at Berehaven and Queenstown. Lough Swilly was not considered to be suitable as a base but Lough Foyle was identified as being suitable for a refuelling base.[27]

Aircraft were seen mainly as an additional support to both the army and the navy, mainly because of how they had been used by the army in the war. Leo Amery, before his appointment as First Lord in 1922, complained about this to General Smuts: 'the inevitable tendency of the Army authorities to look upon aeroplanes as a military adjunct to be distributed to the various military forces in proportion to their importance, much as artillery is distributed.'[28] It was not just the army authorities that saw the role of the RAF in this light. At the Imperial Conference on defence in 1923, Sir Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for Air, stated that the first of the RAF's duties was co-operation with the army and navy.[29]

This attitude prevailed throughout the 1920s and it was not until the 1930s that the potential of air power was finally realised. This is not to suggest that the development of the RAF was held back – far from it – it was Trenchard's success in persuading government of the importance of the development of air power as a third force that lay at the root of the Admiralty's

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[26] Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery papers, quoted in William Sheehan, (ed.), *British voices from the Irish War of Independence 1918-1921: the words of British servicemen who were there* (Cork, 2005), p. 45. Montgomery was Brigade Major with the 17th Infantry Brigade in Cork from 5 Jan. 1921 to 23 May 1922.

[27] Chief of Air Staff memorandum on air power requirements, Dec. 1921 (TNA, CAB 24/71).

[28] Leo Amery to Gen. Jan Smuts, 9 July 1917 (CAC, Amery papers, AMEL 1/3/7).

[29] Notes on Imperial Conference, 19 Oct. 192 (TNA, CAB 24/164).

problems. There was much muddled thinking at the time about the future of the air force. In 1918, the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) and the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) were amalgamated into the new Royal Air Force (RAF). The RAF soon showed itself to be uninterested in naval actions – it was more interested in developing the bombing capability of aircraft.[30] Along with this, all RNAS officers were transferred to the new RAF, thus denuding the Royal Navy of any expertise in air power that it had acquired during the war. The change meant that future naval aircraft would be built by the Air Ministry to Admiralty requirements drawn up by officers with little or no air experience.[31] The decision was serious for the Royal Navy because it lost officers who were young, forward-thinking men who had radical ideas on the future of air-sea power.

Despite the creation of a dedicated air force, admirals continued to have operational control over naval aircraft allocated to their command. They decided how and when they would undertake anti-submarine patrols but they did not have administrative control over pilots and observers who reported instead to the officer in charge of their nearest RAF local command.[32] The change in organisation did not reduce the Admiralty's ability to use aircraft during the war but it did mean that their overall effectiveness was reduced because with each admiral deciding how, when, and where to use the aircraft available to him, no overall tactical plan was formulated on how air power could be used to best advantage. The decision also had a more long-lasting adverse effect post-war on the development of naval air power.

Nevertheless, despite the technological limitations of aircraft at the time, it is now being recognised that their contribution to the fight against the U-boat from 1917 was greater than at first realised.[33] While aircraft were singularly unsuccessful in sinking any U-boats, they were very successful in spotting them and reporting their location, thus enabling naval patrol vessels

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[30] Air Marshall Hugh Trenchard, memorandum, Jan. 1923 (TNA, ADM 1/8678).
[31] Stanley Bonnet, *The price of Admiralty* (London, 1968), p. 236.
[32] Vice Admiral, Commanding East Coast, to Admiralty 3 Mar. 1918 (TNA, ADM 1/8517/70).
[33] For a comprehensive analysis of the contribution of aircraft against the U-boat see John J. Abbatiello, USAF, *Anti-submarine warfare in World War One: British naval aviation and the defeat of the U-boats* (NY, 2006).

to proceed directly to the area.[34] The greater value of aircraft in the conflict, though, was in forcing submarines to submerge once an aircraft was spotted. U-boat commanders immediately dived when they saw an aircraft because, apart from not wanting to be seen themselves, they could not risk being damaged by a lucky hit by a bomb. Even if the submarine escaped serious damage to its hull in such an event, it could be greatly handicapped by damage to its periscope and other critical operational equipment. Keeping a U-boat submerged was a serious hindrance to its effectiveness. From the time they left their home bases, submarines spent a relatively short time in their patrol areas—from a few days to two weeks, depending on the type of submarine—so every minute spent submerged was time lost.[35] In addition, being forced to submerge left a U-boat commander in danger of having his batteries discharged and compelling him to surface and recharge them in daylight. These criteria meant that the effectiveness of aircraft was not determined by the number of U-boats destroyed but by how they curtailed their effectiveness. This was the contribution that aircraft made, despite their technological limitations. Patrolling aircraft restricted the ability of U-boats to find merchant vessels and convoys by forcing them to dive when they did not want to, and keeping them submerged for longer than they wanted.[36]

One historian makes a case that while the Admiralty did not give serious attention to the use of aircraft until late 1916, by the end of the war their value was more fully realised, mainly through notable improvement in aircraft performance.[37] Unfortunately for the Admiralty, this coincided with their loss of control over the design and production of aircraft to the RAF. These changes had little effect on aircraft based in Ireland because by late 1917 all naval aviation had been transferred to the U.S. Naval Air Service, although it remained under the operational control of Vice Admiral Bayly, being the admiral in charge of the command.

German U-boat commanders fully recognised how their activities were curtailed by air patrols, and also how their own lack of supporting air patrols

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[34] John J. Abbatiello, *British naval aviation and the anti-submarine campaign, 1917-1918* (PhD thesis, King's College, London, 2004), p. 152.
[35] Ibid., p. 151.
[36] Ibid., p. 162.
[37] Ibid., p. 249.

by the German air force made it so much more difficult for them to find shipping convoys. Admiral Dönitz wrote:

> ...we also tried, but without air reconnaissance, to get to grips with the shipping passing to the north of Ireland. In this we failed. The boats engaged in these operations were subjected to attack by strong air patrols but found no shipping they themselves could attack.[38]

After the war, the RAF continued to have control over the newly named Fleet Air Arm, and it retained this control until 1939 when it was returned to the Admiralty, but the conflict between the RAF and the RN continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s, with each side striving to maintain its autonomy. The Admiralty's argument was that naval aviation was a specialised form of aviation, especially from aircraft carriers, that needed to be under a single control if it was to be properly developed.[39] The Air Ministry's argument was based on what they referred to as 'the indivisibility of air power' and the need for air power to be under one body if the full benefits of air power were to be realised.[40]

Whatever about the merits of either argument, the persistent discord between the two services, together with an equally damaging lack of government spending on defence, ensured that Britain's naval aviation capability was seriously underdeveloped in comparison with countries such as the U.S. where naval aviation was under the control of the navy.[41] This underdevelopment became manifest by 1939, when facilities in Ireland for Britain's shorter range and older aircraft became more important than ever if they were to have an effective role in combatting the U-boat menace.

Some of the blame for this is levelled at Admiral Beatty when, as First Sea Lord after the war, he failed to convince three Conservative administrations between 1922 and 1927 to accept the case for the need for

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[38] Dönitz, Karl, *Memoirs: ten years and twenty days*,, trans. by R.H. Stephens & D. Woodward (London, 2000) (first published Bonn, 1959 as *Zehn Jahre und zwanzig Tage: Erinnerungen 1935-1945*), p. 177.
[39] COS memorandum 'Report of organisation of and responsibilities for naval aviation', 20 Apr. 1937 (TNA, CAB 53/31).
[40] Stephen Roskill, 'Naval policy between the wars: the period of reluctant rearmament'(2 vols, London 1976), ii, 401.
[41] Rear Adm. J.M. Reeves to CNO, USM, 6 Dec. 1928 in Michael Simpson, (ed.), *Anglo-American naval relations, 1919-1939* (Farnham, 2010), p. 217).

the Fleet Air Arm to be totally under Admiralty control.[42] It is not suggested that he did not try; he did try, repeatedly.[43] Part of the problem was that Beatty was still convinced that the capital ship would remain the dominant influence in any future sea warfare, despite all likely technological developments. He was a naval traditionalist, locked in the belief that major battles at sea would still determine victory. He also had a belief throughout his years as First Sea Lord that new capital ships had nothing to fear from either bombing by aircraft or torpedoing by submarines,[44] and despite his experiences of the war he did not deviate from this belief.[45] This belief in the omnipotence of the capital ship was not confined to the navies of Britain and Germany. One of the strongest contributors to this naval thinking was Rear Admiral A.T. Mahan, the great American naval strategist and tactician whose writings influenced navies throughout the world. He was an advocate of a navy built around big guns on big ships as the route to naval supremacy. Alongside this, he saw the navy as being central to the creation and maintenance of an empire, citing the Royal Navy's role in the creation and defence of the British empire. Mahan's principles were almost universally accepted, especially in the U.S. navy, and they influenced so many officers that he is credited with bonding the navy to the battleship right up to 1941, when the full potential of air power was finally realised.[46]

An interesting aside to this is Mahan's own analysis of the development of naval tactics. He observed that while changes in tactics only happen after changes in weapons, the interval between these changes is too long, and that 'changes in tactics have to overcome the inertia of the conservative class...History shows that it is vain to hope that military men generally will be

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42 B. McL. Ranft, (ed.), *The Beatty Papers: selections from the private and official correspondence and papers of Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty* (2 vols, Aldershot, 1993), p. xxi.
43 Admiralty memorandum to CID, 6 Feb. 1922 (TNA, CAB 21/225); Beatty to Churchill, 19 Mar. 1922, Beatty to Churchill, 17 July 1922, Hankey to Lloyd George, 1 Aug. 1922 in Ranft, (ed.), *The Beatty papers*, pp 212-217.
44 Stephen Roskill, *Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty: last naval hero* (London, 1980), p. 303.
45 Ranft, (ed.), *The Beatty Papers*, p. xv.
46 M.E. Shulman, 'The influence of Mahan on sea power', in *Reviews in American history*, xix, no. 4 (Dec., 1991), pp 523-4. (www.jstor.org.).

at pains to do this.'[47] His disciples in the British and American navies did not see this warning as applying to themselves.

The protection of the naval bases in Ireland against a land-based attack had been a concern of the Admiralty in 1918 because of the general unrest in Ireland, and it brought these concerns to government. It maintained that there was 'a fundamental difference between naval interests in Ireland and the military interests in Ireland' because a rebellion in the country would have only an indirect effect on the army, in that it would be necessary to divert troops from the European war to put down any rebellion, but the navy would be directly affected in the event of disruption to the ports because any such disruption to the navy's operational activities would have a direct effect on its war efforts.[48] It summed up its situation by describing the navy in Ireland as being in the war zone while the army was not, and it warned the government of the importance of proper defences for the ports when considering measures to deal with disturbance in Ireland.[49]

On a more general note, the Admiralty had already emphasised the importance of the defended ports as a secure base for the Royal Navy and in the overall defences of Britain. They also advised how important the south-west of Ireland was in Britain's communication system, with nine out of twelve transatlantic cables landing there and with one third of all GB-US cable traffic going across Irish land.[50]

It was during World War One that the theoretical strategic importance of Ireland's location was proven. With the exception of the battle of Jutland, a stalemate existed between the British Grand Fleet and the German High Seas Fleet. The British policy of blockading the Germans in their home base had the dual objective of preventing food and supplies from reaching Germany while ensuring that its own supply lines were able to operate relatively unhampered – at least that was the theory. Naval philosophy at the time dictated that victory at sea could only be achieved by a pitched battle between the main belligerents—tactics that had prevailed since Nelson's time. In such

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[47] Rear Admiral A.T. Mahan, *The influence of sea power upon history* (Boston, 1890,Gutenberg online edition 2004), p. 10 (www.gutenberg.com).
[48] Sir Eric Geddes, First Lord of Admiralty to War Cabinet, 29 Mar. 1918 (TNA, CAB 24/133).
[49] Ibid.
[50] Admiralty cabinet memorandum, 29 Mar. 1918 (TNA, CAB 24/133).

a battle, the dreadnought battleship, with its enormous firepower, was the ultimate fighting machine. This was the received wisdom among the high command of both navies. Lord Chatfield, an Admiral of the Fleet and a long-serving First Sea Lord, describes the Royal Navy's thinking on naval tactics in the early part of the war: 'We considered the battle-cruisers the spearhead of the Grand Fleet, like the cavalry of a great army, behind us that vast, powerful fleet of battleships which, if they could get into action, would have little difficulty in annihilating the enemy.'[51]

Chatfield, along with many senior naval officers, had always advocated the primacy of the battleship, and many believed that on his appointment he would allocate too much money towards capital ships to the detriment of destroyers and escort vessels.[52] For him, and others in high command, the submarine did not feature in plans on how victory at sea could be achieved. In explaining the navy's failure to be dominant at the battle of Jutland, Chatfield showed his mind-set when he drew a comparison with Nelson's action at Trafalgar, offering the excuse that Nelson knew his enemy's capabilities and firepower while the Royal Navy high command did not.[53] While submarines were recognised by both naval commands as being useful additions to their naval forces, they were never thought of as being capable of winning a war. Moreover, they were not considered ships in the traditional sense of the word and their underhand method of fighting did not sit well with equally traditional gentlemanly codes of naval warfare. At the start of the war the submarine was considered by most senior navy officers, in both Britain and Germany, to be too slow to be of a danger to warships, but there was another, much smaller, school of thought that did recognise the potential threat and that foresaw how the decisive battle for supremacy at sea would be fought against submarines. Nevertheless, the Admiralty proceeded with its capital ship building programme and it was only after three years of war and grievous loss of commercial shipping that escort ships were able to assume dominance over the U-boat.[54] Fortunately for the British, for the first six months of the

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[51] Lord Chatfield, *The navy and defence: the autobiography of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Chatfield* (Kingswood, 1942), p. 149.
[52] Peter Kemp, 'Alfred Ernle Montacute Chatfield, naval officer', in *Oxford DNB* (www.oxforddnb.com).
[53] Chatfield, *The navy and defence*, p. 149.
[54] Kemp, 'Alfred Ernle Montacute Chatfield', in *Oxford DNB*.

war even the German Admiralty did not fully appreciate the potential of their U-boats as a counter-measure to the containment of their High Seas Fleet in their home base.[55]

However, with its ships confined to base, Germany was forced to look elsewhere for a solution to its problems at sea, and the submarine became the natural option for consideration. Before the outbreak of war the German naval high command had no plans to use submarines against commercial shipping. It had planned to use them for coastal defence of major ports and naval bases, and for anti-warship patrols in the North Sea. It was not until the war on the Western Front had settled down into a stalemate and the effects of the British blockade were becoming a serious problem that the German staff began to seriously consider using submarines to retaliate and to attempt to block Britain's supply lines by attacking commercial shipping to and from Britain.[56] Germany declared the first of two submarine blockades against Britain in February 1915. However, a number of ships were sunk without warning, including passenger liners, which brought strong protests from neutral countries, and the German naval command was obliged to end this first blockade six months after it had been started, mainly because of increased pressure from the United States. The sinking of the *Lusitania* in May 1915 with the loss of 1,201 lives had brought very strong and widespread condemnation, but none more so than from the United States.

The unrestricted campaign soon became all too effective to the extent that it was in the Western Approaches that the Allies began to face the possibility of defeat in 1917. Shipping losses were mounting to such unsustainable levels that Jellicoe declared that Britain was losing the war because Germany was sinking British ships at a faster rate than Britain could replace them.[57] The actual figures illustrate the alarming trend. British shipping losses in January 1917 were 104,000 tons; in February, 256,000 tons; in March, 283,000 tons; in April, 513,000 tons, and most of these losses

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[55] A. Temple Patterson (ed.), *The Jellicoe papers* (2 vols, Shortlands, 1966), i, 137.
[56] Karl Lautenslager, 'The submarine in naval warfare' in *International Security*, xi, no. 3 Winter, 1986-1987, pp 111-112 (www.jstor.org).
[57] John Rushworth Jellicoe, *The Grand Fleet, 1914-1916: its creation, development and work* (London, 1919), p. 54.

were in the west and south-west of Ireland.[58] The April figure represented the loss of approximately thirteen ships per day, while the loss for the first week of May alone was 113 ships.[59] This meant that one in every four ships leaving Britain never returned.[60] Sir Henry Newbolt has identified the area in which most of the damage was being done: 'The central point of this zone of devastation was about one hundred and seventy miles due west of Berehaven in the open waters of the Atlantic.'[61]

It was a myth that the Royal Navy controlled the seas. Admiral Jellicoe, the First Sea Lord, admitted so to Vice Admiral William Sims, C-in-C, U.S. Naval Forces in Europe, when he met him in London in April 1917, and when asked by Sims if there was a solution to the problem answered: 'Absolutely none that I can see.'[62] Jellicoe had already advised Churchill: 'We are carrying on the war at the present time as if we had the absolute command of the high seas, whereas we have not much command or anything approaching it'.[63] This belief was not confined to navy circles. In April, Lord Derby, the Minister for War, wrote to Field Marshall Haig: 'The state of affairs now existing is really very bad indeed, and we have lost command of the sea.'[64]

The United States finally declared war in April 1917, and on 4 May America's first engagement in the war came about when the six destroyers of the Eighth Division Destroyer Force of the United States Navy arrived in Irish waters to the sound of British minesweepers exploding German mines that had been laid overnight in the entrance channel to Cork Harbour.[65]. Another destroyer flotilla arrived every week until by July 1917 there were thirty six destroyers based in Queenstown and Berehaven, along with support ships.[66] The USN ships and crews continued to be based in Queenstown and

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[58] Ibid, pp 44-5.
[59] US Ambassador Page to Secretary of State, 28 Apr. 1917, U.S. Department of State Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1917. Supplement 2, The World War, vol. i (1917). (http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS).
[60] Churchill, *The world crisis*, p. 744.
[61] Henry Newbolt (ed.), *Official History of World War based on official documents: naval operations*, (5 vols, London, 1920-38), iv, 384.
[62] Vice Admiral William S. Sims, *The victory at sea* (New York, 1920), p. 8.
[63] Jellicoe to Churchill, 27 Apr. 1917 in Newbolt, (ed.), *Official history of the Great War*, v, 21.
[64] Derby to Haig, 18 Apr. 1917, quoted in John Terraine, *The road to Passchendaele: the Flanders offensive of 1917* (London, 1977), p. 72.
[65] *The Queenstown patrol, 1917*, ed. William S. Still, p. 22.
[66] Bayly, *Pull together*, pp 220-2.

Berehaven for the rest of the war, and were an integral part of the Western Approaches naval force under the operational control of Vice Admiral Bayly of the Royal Navy.

The U-boat menace was eventually overcome because of the availability of adequate numbers of destroyers and the adoption of the convoy system for transatlantic traffic. The strategy of focussing attention on Queenstown, Berehaven, and Lough Swilly, and concentrating on ensuring the safe passage of supplies and troops across the Atlantic was, arguably, the most important decision that was taken in how to deploy American and British naval forces. The summer of 1918 saw significant change in the course of the war for the Allies and, for the first time, its output of shipping exceeded its losses. Such closeness to defeat framed the Admiralty's belief in the importance of Ireland's geographic location to Britain's defences. In a memorandum of 22 October 1921, Vice Admiral Sir Osmond Brock, the Deputy Chief of Naval Staff, reminded the British treaty negotiators of just how close Britain had come to defeat because of the loss of shipping in the south-western approaches, and impressed on them that 'the Naval Staff assert most definitely that had the Fleet been deprived of the use of Irish bases, and had the freedom of action of our naval forces been limited in Irish Waters, our position would have been a desperate one.'[67] Brock was in a position to press home his message as he had been appointed a technical advisor to the British negotiators.

The victory at sea over the U-boat did not receive the glory that a traditional naval head-to-head conflict might have received but, in the opinion of Sir Henry Newbolt, it was 'a victory as remarkable as any in British history'.[68] This victory provided confirmation of just how strategically important the Treaty Ports were and it shaped Admiralty thinking in future defence planning, (although Admiralty complacency over its ability to overcome a U-boat threat in any future war was proved to be misplaced[69]). It was a naval victory by the combined British and American naval forces that

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[67] Adm. Sir O. de B. Brock, memorandum 22 Oct. 1921 (TNA, CAB 21/243).
[68] Newbolt, (ed.), *Official History of the Great War*, v, 337.
[69] Anne McLean & Suzanne Poole, *Fighting ships of World Wars One and Two* (London, 1976), p. 104. As late as 1937 the Admiralty advised the Shipping Defence Advisory Committee that they had the means to counter any U-boat threat by the adoption of the *asdic* sonar detection system, a system that was much better than hydrophones but still had limitations, especially in its range of elevation. It was also limited by its inability to detect surfaces vessels.

was achieved with no more than nominal involvement by the army or air forces. The Admiralty again proved how important it had been for the navy to be in control of the seas in the western approaches to Britain, and to have access to defended harbours in those seas. A recognition of this significance during the war appeared in a report in *The Times* in August 1919:

> The part that Queenstown played during the Great War is not generally known by reason of the very necessary veil of secrecy that was drawn over its work. Someday the full story will be told, and it will prove to be thrilling and amazing...Queenstown, as the war progressed became one of the most important ports for fighting the submarine menace.[70]

This explains why the Admiralty laid such stress on maintaining control over the ports for the next twenty years. Britain's south coast was well protected by the bulk of the navy's fleets; the weakness was in its western defences—the lifeline to the empire. Churchill, as First Lord of the Admiralty, was fully conscious of the dangers that Britain had faced, and how close to collapse Britain had come. His analysis of the state of affairs was unequivocal: 'The great approach route to the south-west of Ireland was becoming a veritable cemetery of British shipping...the danger of collapse in 1918 began to loom large and imminent'.[71]

The historical importance that the Admiralty and the British government had attached to the ports was always going to be a factor in any discussions about independence for a new Irish state, but the additional experience of the First World War ensured that neither parliament nor public opinion would condone any agreement that would result in a weakening of the country's western defences.

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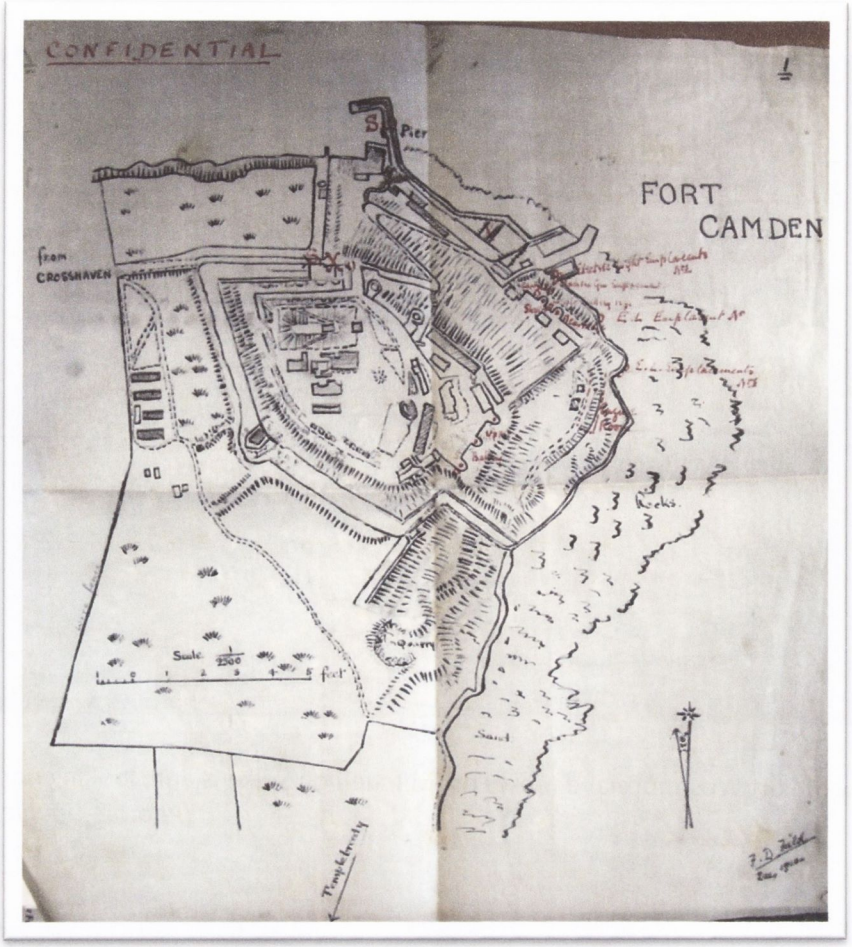
[70] *The Times*, 17 June 1919.
[71] Winston Churchill, *The world crisis 1911-1918* (1st edn., London, 1931; London, 1968), p. 744.

Aerial view of Fort Westmoreland (now Fort Mitchel) on Spike Island, looking northwards
(Photo: Google Earth)

A similar aerial view of Fort Westmoreland, looking southwards. This photo shows clearly the deep and wide dry-moat surrounding the fort. *(Photo: by kind permission dylecca)*



War Office map of Fort Camden 1912 WO 192/32
(Image: The National Archives)

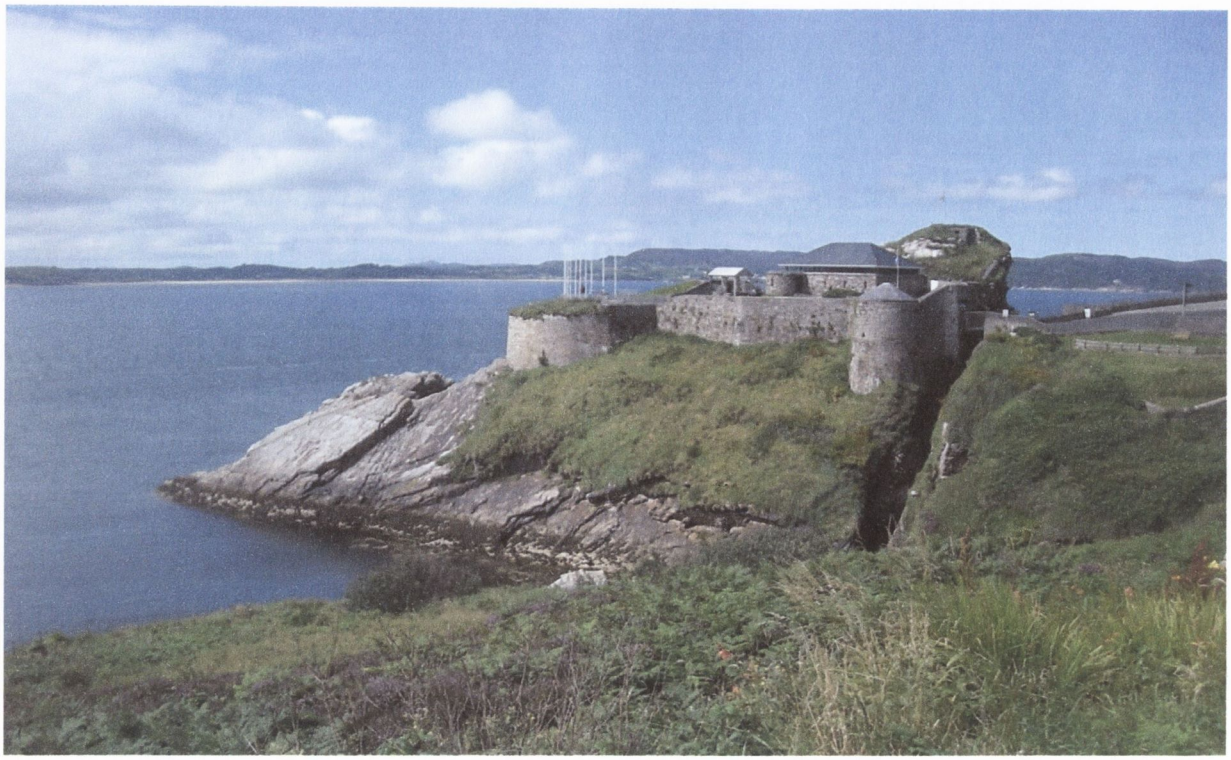
Aerial view of Fort Camden on the west side of the entrance to Cork Harbour
(Photo: by kind permission Siobhan Russell)

Inside Fort Westmoreland (now Fort Mitchel) looking east towards the administration building and assembly room where dances were held. *(photo: author)*

Fort Westmoreland parade ground looking west towards one of the troop accommodation blocks. *(photo: author)*

View from 6-inch gun emplacement on Spike Island covering the harbour entrance
(*Photo: author*)

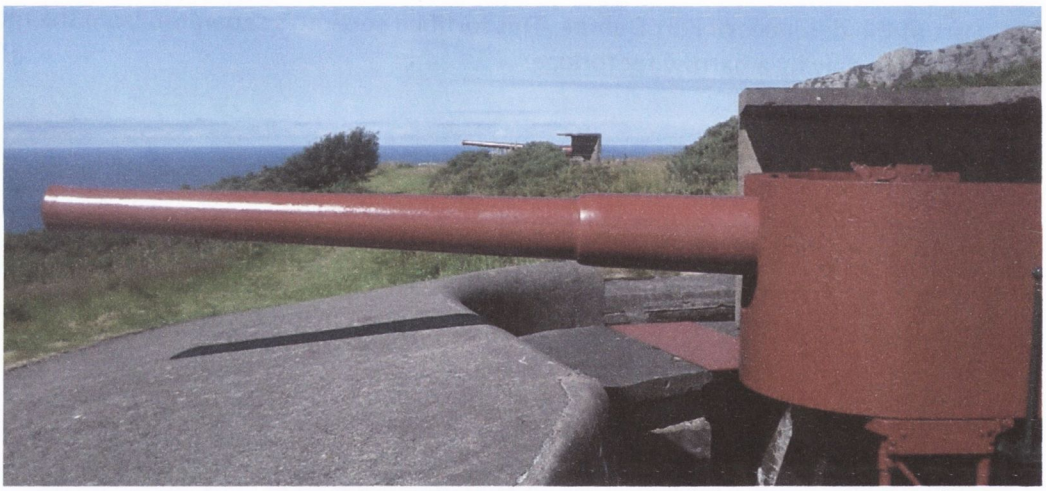
Another view from same gun emplacement showing its commanding view of any vessel attempting to enter Cork Harbour *(Photo: author).*



Part of the defences of Fort Dunree. This fortified section is separated from the mainland and is accessible only by a narrow footbridge. (Photo: author)

View of some of the remains of the living quarters, washrooms, canteens of Fort Dunree. The administration block, along with the hospital and other structures, formerly to the right of the road, have been demolished. (*Photo: author).*

One of the two 6-inch guns that had a commanding view over Lough Swilly. Fanad Head and the open sea are shown in the distance.



This second gun is located about 25 metres to the left of the gun in the top photo.

Derelict lookout post on highest point of Dunree defences above the guns and (right) another view of the above 6-inch gun showing the access to the underground quarters and ammunition storage bays

(All photos: author)

Aerial view of Fort Dunree defences and garrison buildings *(Photo: unknown)*

View from one of the 6-inch guns high on Dunree Head towards the beach of Port Salon
(Photo: author)

Two rusting 6-inch guns at the remains of Lonehort battery, Bere Island. The two emplacements were connected by underground passages and munitions storage facilities.
(Photo: by permission of Bere Island Project Group)

Part of Lonehort battery, Bere Island, now derelict *(Photo: unknown)*

2. The defended ports in the early 20th century

Before discussing the course of events leading to the Anglo-Irish Treaty and the continuing British military control of what became known of the Treaty Ports in 1922, it is worthwhile reviewing the structures of the ports' defences during the early twentieth century and in the years after Irish independence in order to understand their physical dimension.

Cobh (Queenstown until 1922), Berehaven, and Lough Swilly were not ports in the accepted sense of being commercial ports, although Cobh did have a small amount of commercial traffic.[1] They were deep-water, defended harbours that provided safe anchorage for large numbers of ships, and it was this property that made them so important to the Royal Navy.

There was nothing unusual about the three Irish ports. They were an integral part of the defence system of defended ports and harbours that surrounded the coastline of the United Kingdom that had existed from about 1540 to 1956,[2] but their location ensured that they were the front line of defence in the western approaches to Britain.

The main objective of coastal defence was the protection of naval bases by preventing enemy warships from attacking ships at anchor in the harbour and from shelling dockyard facilities such as dockyards, fuel depots, wharves and other installations. They were also intended to be a defence against a landing force from enemy ships.[3] This 'coast artillery', as it was known, has been defined as 'artillery designed and trained to fire at moving targets', naval targets initially but later aerial also.[4] The harbour defences were provided by a fort, or number of forts, that housed batteries of heavy artillery that were strategically located to be able to attack an enemy approaching the harbour entrance. The Irish harbours were each defended by a number of heavily armed forts that were accessible by land and sea, but not at all times.

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[1] Queenstown defence details, 1931 (TNA, WO 192/34).
[2] Maurice-Jones, *The history of coast artillery*, p. 2.
[3] Ibid., pp 2-3.
[4] Rodney Smith, 'The combined arms in coast defence' in *The Journal of the Royal Artillery*, liv (1927-28), p.236.

The army was responsible for building and manning all forts, the costs of which were borne by War Office budgets, but the navy decided where the forts would be located and the level of defences required for them. It did this by determining a degree of importance for each defended port based on the nature and strength of attack that the port would likely attract.[5] The army had no input into this decision.

Cork harbour was defended by Fort Templebreedy and Fort Camden on the west bank of the 1.5-mile channel into the harbour and by Fort Carlisle on the east bank. Fort Westmoreland, the largest fort, was on Spike Island in the centre of the harbour. There was easy access to the harbour in all weathers through a wide channel leading to a natural deep-water harbour that could accommodate a fleet of ships.

Bere Island had ten batteries, each a self-contained unit, five located along the west coast of the island and five on the east side. The largest 9.2-inch guns were at Rerrin battery in the west of the island and at Ardnakinna Point in the west. The Admiralty's view as late as 1906 was that these defences were strong enough to ensure that no hostile force could gain access to Bantry Bay without first capturing or disabling the batteries but it did recognise the possibility of hostile ships slipping past at night unseen and being able to 'anchor off Bantry, out of fire of the Bere Island forts'.[6]. However, this view had changed significantly by 1925 when an Admiralty report described the defences as having 'no relation to...the coast defence problems of today' and that 'if Bearhaven is to be a Main Fleet Base, and fortified accordingly, a heavy constructional expenditure can be expected...'[7] Bere Island was attractive to the Royal Navy because it was large enough to shelter a fleet of warships in all weathers and was accessible through a channel eight to ten metres deep to the east of the island.[8] The general area was also attractive because it had been noted that there were three separate sites, with sufficient water supply, adjacent to Bantry that could be used as camping

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[5] Julian Corbett, *History of the Great War based on official documents: naval operations* (5 vols, London, 1920-38), i, 5.
[6] *The land defence of the United Kingdom part 1: Ireland* (London, 1909), (TNA, WO 33/544), p. 15.
[7] Report on Irish coast defences 1925, 31 July 1925 (TNA, WO 32/5315).
[8] *The land defence of the United Kingdom part 2: Ireland* (London, 1909), (TNA, WO 33/545), p. 161.

sites each large enough to accommodate a division of troops if they were ever needed.[9]

The defences on Bere Island had long been considered inadequate against attack from land, a fact also recognised in the 1925 report that commented on how isolated the officers' messes were on the island. They were described as being situated in a hollow, isolated from the forts, and forming 'a most tempting target for a raiding party.[10] Another report some years later described the accommodation as being 'scattered hutments without any obstacle between them and the inhabitants of the island'.[11] When some of the heavy guns were being upgraded in 1933 these considerations were taken into account and five new blockhouses, protected by barbed wire and searchlights, were constructed on different parts of the island as well as a large earthen embankment overlooking Rerrin village.[12]

Lough Swilly was defended by two forts on the east side of the lough: Fort Dunree and Fort Lenan. The guns at Dunree were intended to fight a close-range battle and to cover the examination area while the larger guns at Lenan were intended to engage the enemy at long range.[13] The Admiralty considered Lough Swilly to be 'a magnificent harbour' and so well defended that no enemy could make use of it unless they first captured or disabled the guns.[14] It could also provide safe anchorage for a fleet of large ships in very rough weather. Lough Swilly proved its worth to the Admiralty during World War One when up to fifty destroyers and sloops were based there at any one time.[15] An additional benefit for the Royal Navy was that it was recognised to be the only port in Western Europe where coastal batteries could practice gunfire without hindrance from commercial traffic.[16]

Lough Swilly also proved its worth in October 1914 when a squadron of the Grand Fleet was sheltered there for a few weeks, in the absence of any other suitably defended anchorage, when it was realised that U-boats could

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[9] Ibid., p. 165.
[10] Report on Irish coastal defences, 1925 (TNA, WO 32/5315).
[11] General Staff memorandum to ISC, 6 Apr. 1932 (TNA, ADM 178/161).
[12] Chief Supt. FitzGerald, Bandon, to Commissioner, 4 Dec. 1933; Supt. P. Doyle, Bantry to Chief Supt., Cork 13 Dec. 1933; Chief. Supt., Cork, to Commissioner, 30 July 1936 (NAI, JUS 8/434).
[13] J.E. Dawson and Cormac Lalor, 'Coast defence artillery' in *An Cosantóir*, Nov. 1973, p. 395.
[14] *The land defence of the United Kingdom part 1: Ireland; part 1* (TNA, WO 33/544), p. 24.
[15] Newbolt (ed.), *Official History of World War*, v, 392-6.
[16] John Buttimer, 'The treaty ports' in *An Cosantóir*, July 1978, p. 201.

travel so far north. The sight of the fleet in Lough Swilly and the nervousness in military minds following the sinking of HMS *Audacious* off Lough Swilly some days earlier has been eloquently described by Denis Ireland, the Irish writer and later senator, who was then an army officer recently posted to Lough Swilly:

> Lough Swilly stretched deep blue beneath and beyond it the jumble of the Donegal highlands lay spread along the western horizon. Below in the golden September sunlight lay the camp of my new regiment [the Royal Irish Regiment], the tiny honey-coloured cones of the tents ranged in orderly lines on a green headland jutting out into the lough...Then came October and the Grand Fleet, the boom of the mine that sank the Audacious; fog and increasing nervousness about the German submarine campaign. For two days the fog continued, the fleet remained invisible in the lough, and rumour grew and multiplied in the camp. London was burning and the seat of the British government had been transferred to Dublin. Then the fog lifted, the fleet departed, filing in narrow procession through the narrows under the glare of searchlights from the fort.[17]

After 1922, supplies to the forts were made by sea whenever possible, but also by land when necessary. For instance, Fort Carlisle, in Cork harbour, could not be reached by sea during gales at high tide and it could be cut off for days.[18] The two forts in Lough Swilly presented great difficulties for boats landing because the sea was rarely calm enough for them to be able to do so.[19] Landings could only be made at a pier at Fort Dunree and at a slipway at Fort Lenan in the calmest of weather and then only in a small rowing boat.[20] Buncrana, eight miles from Dunree, was accessible by larger boats at all times except when a gale was blowing.[21]

Artillery in the forts in 1914 and until 1922 was manned by the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA), a division of the Royal Artillery, while defence of the forts themselves was provided by army infantry troops. These troops were responsible for defending the forts from attack from the sea by a landing force, and also from attack from land. After 1922, all infantry troops were withdrawn from the forts and defensive duties were taken over by the men of the RGA. In fact, it was the fear of attack from land by armed republicans, especially

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[17] Denis Ireland, *From the Irish shore: notes on my life and times (London, 1936)*, pp 223, 227.
[18] Queenstown defence details 1931 (TNA, WO 192/34).
[19] General Staff memorandum to ISC, 6 Apr. 1932 (TNA, CAB 27/525).
[20] 'Orders for destroyer in northern waters,' appendix 1, 14 Aug. 1933 (TNA, ADM 178/91).
[21] Ibid.

during the War of Independence that concerned them most. Maintenance of the guns, searchlights, communications and other equipment was provided by the Royal Engineers. Each fort was under the command of the senior Royal Artillery officer, and under him were fire-commanders who each commanded a group of batteries within the same area, the group being known as a 'fire command'.[22] The batteries in these commands were classified as heavy, medium or light. Each battery, under the command of a battery commander, consisted of one or more guns, but all such guns were of the same type. Four sizes of gun were in place in the ports in 1914, although not all three ports had the same number and sizes of guns. The largest, the 9.2-inch heavy gun, which was intended to deal with attack by battleships and cruisers had a range of almost twelve miles.[23] The other guns were the 6-inch, 4.7-inch, and 12-pounder, which were intended to combat progressively smaller ships and landing craft.[24]

Until 1922 the ports themselves were under the control of the Royal Navy. All traffic in and out of the ports was subject to the authority of the senior naval officer. For instance, each port had an area that was designated an 'examination anchorage' in which all incoming vessels had to stop and wait until examined by an examination officer before they could proceed to a destination in the harbour. Each examination area was covered by a particular battery that had standing orders to fire a round across the bows of any vessel that did not stop, and to sink it if it continued to refuse.[25] In addition, each port had a War Signal station, to be manned in time of war by navy personnel who had the duty of identifying any warship that appeared within sight and reporting its presence to naval headquarters and to coast artillery.[26] The Royal Navy's emergency defence scheme for the ports in the late 1930s included plans to implement the examination service and war signal stations in the event of war.[27]

The number of troops manning the forts varied throughout the years 1914 to 1938. The forts on Bere Island in November 1918 were manned by a

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[22] Maurice-Jones, *The history of coast artillery*, p. 182.
[23] Smith, 'The combined arms in coast defence' in *The Journal of the Royal Artillery*, liv, p.236.
[24] Maurice-Jones, *The history of coast artillery*, p. 182.
[25] 'Instructions for examination service 1921-22' (TNA, ADM 239/12).
[26] Fort Camden record book 1907 – 1929 (TNA, WO 192/32).
[27] 'Queenstown interim defence scheme 1931' (TNA, WO 192/34), p. 25.

total of 14 officers and 273 other ranks[28] but by 1931 this was reduced to 5 officers and 118 other ranks (including 5 batmen, or officers' servants).[29]

The total numbers in the forts in 1923 were:[30]

	Officers	Other Ranks
Cobh	38	533
Berehaven	16	274
Lough Swilly	13	167
Total	67	974

The total numbers in 1924 were as follows:[31]

	Officers	Other Ranks
Cobh	39	509
Berehaven	8	211
Lough Swilly	12	167
Total	59	887

By 1931 the numbers at Cobh were reduced to 32 officers and 425 other ranks stationed, all of whom lived in single or married quarters in each fort.[32] The numbers of Royal Garrison Artillery men in each of the forts at this time were:

	Officers	*Other*
Fort Westmoreland	13	156
Fort Carlisle	5	82
Forts Camden and Templebreedy	6	108
Total	24	346

The balance was made up of 8 officers and 69 other ranks from the various service corps such as the Royal Corps of Signals, the Royal Army

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[28] War Diaries of 49th Coy. RGA 1915-1919 (TNA, WO 95/5456).
[29] Berehaven defence file 1930 (TNA, WO 192/35).
[30] Memorandum on questions relating to Ireland, n.d. but probably Feb. 1923 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).
[31] War Office memorandum, 24 Mar. 1924 (TNA, CO 739/26).
[32] 'Queenstown interim defence scheme 1931', appendix 'A' (TNA, WO 192/34)

Corps, the Royal Army Medical Corps, and the military police.[33] (It is also of note that between 1926 and 1928 there were between 90 and 100 families in married quarters on Spike Island).[34]

By April 1932, War Office figures show that the garrison numbers of all ranks totalled 728 plus families.[35] These were dispersed as follows:

Port	*Strength - All ranks*	*Number Wives*	*Approx. no. Children*
Cobh	425	69	32
Bere Island	153	16	32
Lough Swilly	150	12	24
Total	728	97	194

Before 1922, the defence of the forts (sentry duty etc.) was in the hands of infantry troops but after the treaty was implemented, and when all regular infantry battalions left the country, the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA) took over these duties along with their regular duties of manning the big guns. This was of some concern to the War Office in 1925 when a commissioned report on Irish defences stated that 'the present garrison is insufficient to man the coast defences and to guard the land fronts'[36] but in the economic climate of the time and the unlikelihood of war in the foreseeable future there was no prospect of any change.

The forts were self-contained units in which men could exist for a number of weeks if they were cut off from normal communications. They had their own cookhouses, washrooms, sleeping quarters, food and fuel stores, and they each had their own hospital – typically a ten-bedded structure. However, one request by a group of NCOs in Fort Camden suggests that some accommodation left something to be desired. They applied for permission to use a vacant room in a barracks as a mess room for senior NCOs in the fort. Their commanding officer supported their request, adding the information that 'Up to date they have been living and messing in gun rooms, lamp rooms,

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[33] 'Queenstown interim defence scheme 1931', appendix 'B' (TNA, WO 192/34).
[34] Ibid.; Dept. of Defence report, 'British naval bases: Cobh', 9 Apr.1926 (MA, CD/1/7; CD/7).
[35] General Staff memorandum to ISC, 6 Apr. 1932 (TNA, CAB 27/525).
[36] Lt-Colonel H.D.G. Crerar, 'Report on South Irish coast defences, 1925' (TNA, WO 32/5315).

Maxim stores, and any other corner they could get'.[37] His clinching argument was that there would be no extra cost to the War Office if they agreed to his request.

Water supply for all the forts was always an important consideration in emergencies, and all, with the exception of Fort Westmoreland on Spike Island had their own supplies through natural springs. In addition, the four forts in Queenstown had storage tanks that held approximately four months' supply of water. Neither Spike Island nor Haulbowline had their own supply and they relied on a pipeline from Great Island.[38] Even though they had storage capacity for several weeks' supply, the lack of an independent supply was an inherent weakness in their defences, and this became a matter of great concern during the Civil War. The Senior Naval Officer (SNO), Capt. Hugh Somerville, expressed his concern to the Admiralty in July 1922 when he highlighted how their water supply could be shut off simply by shutting off a valve.[39] He then pointed out that the pipeline carrying the water to the islands traversed Belvelly Bridge on Great Island, and if this were to be destroyed in a conflict their supply would also be cut off.[40] He requested the Admiralty for a water-distilling vessel to be made available to him if it became necessary. The Admiralty accepted Somerville's concerns but as they did not have such a vessel available they arranged for a naval water tanker to be sent.[41] Somerville's concern was warranted because Belvelly Bridge was destroyed the following month during the Civil War.[42] The water main escaped damage but it was destroyed a few days later, and while Haulbowline was without fresh water for almost a week, it was able to rely on its storage tanks, but the damage caused a serious water shortage for the residents of Cobh.[43] Another interruption to Spike Island's water supply happened in 1932 when a collision at Haulbowline fractured the water pipe to the island, cutting off water for several days.[44]

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[37] O/C, 10th Coy. RGA to Officer i/c Barracks ASC, Queenstown, no date but probably 1911-1914 (TNA, WO 192/32 Fort Camden record book 1907-1929).
[38] 'Queenstown interim defence scheme, 1931'. Appendix 'B'. (TNA, WO 192/34).
[39] Somerville to Admiralty, 5 July 1922 (TNA, ADM 178/159).
[40] Somerville to Admiralty, 6 July 1922 (TNA, ADM 178/159).
[41] Engineer-in-Chief, Plymouth memorandum to Admiralty, 15 July, 1922 (TNA, ADM 178/159).
[42] Somerville to Admiralty, 9 Aug. 1922 (TNA, ADM 178/159).
[43] Somerville to Admiralty, 13 Aug. 1922 (TNA, ADM 178/159).
[44] General Staff memorandum to ISC, 6 Apr. 1932 (TNA, CAB 13/4).

The facilities at Haulbowline and Rathmullen were among the first properties within the ports' areas that the Admiralty decided that it no longer considered essential in October 1921.[45] They suggested to cabinet that these be offered for sale to commercial companies, but that purchasers be obliged to retain a minimum stock for Admiralty purposes. It also decided to close down all war signal stations and recommended offering them to the Irish Free State government. Finally, it advised the government that it proposed to dispose of all Admiralty property other than that directly needed for harbour defences. This included the Haulbowline dockyard and all coastguard stations.[46] While the dockyard had been of great value during the First World War, it could be justified no longer in the changed situation.

The news of plans to dispose of the dockyard caused great concern in Cork because of the amount of employment it gave in the area and where numbers employed had already been decreasing since 1918. The dockyard had been the largest employer of men in the area for many years, and a significant number of them were skilled workers and apprentices. In fact, the numbers employed in 1918 were such that they were causing a housing problem in the catchment area.[47] It was reported that the demand for houses was far in excess of what was available, and the prohibitive cost of materials deterred people from building more.[48] At one point, panic spread through the residents of the hamlet of Whitepoint that they were to be evicted from their houses by the Admiralty in order to provide accommodation for dockyard naval personnel. Queenstown Urban Council was obliged to take up the matter with Admiralty House before Vice Admiral Bayly issued a statement that the residents had nothing to fear. One newspaper account reported that the situation was so bad that 'senior officials are to be found in residences that they would not think of occupying. Some...have through force of circumstances to put up with joint tenancy of houses, or rooms in occupied houses'.[49] It is not known if these 'senior officials' complained about their living quarters but it would appear, from the newspaper comment, that even

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[45] Cabinet memorandum, 15 Oct. 1921 (TNA, CAB 24/129).
[46] Ibid.
[47] *Cork Examiner*, 17 May 1918.
[48] *Cork Evening Echo*, 4 May 1918.
[49] *Cork Evening Echo*, 4 May 1918; 11 May 1918; 17 May 1918.

in the latter stages of the war, there existed a belief that people in the navy from certain backgrounds had an entitlement to comforts not available to others.

The *Irish Independent* estimated that the number employed in the dockyard at that time was about 3,000[50] but with the ending of the war this number rapidly diminished. On 31 March 1921, 1,099 men were employed in the dockyard but by 18 February 1922 this had decreased to 451, those discharged being 'non-established' or casual employees, the balance being 'established' or skilled workmen.[51] This latter group had already been advised of their fate in September 1921, when they were informed that they were to be given the choice of either being discharged on a small Treasury pension based on their years of employment, or being transferred to other naval shipyards in England.[52] A great many of these men were married with families and it is not surprising that most of them chose the former. However, by January 1922, the Admiralty changed its mind and decided that all men under fifty years of age would be transferred to Admiralty dockyards in England; those declining to go would be discharged without pension. The men were given until 31 January to make up their minds. By this time 180 apprentices had already been transferred.[53] The Admiralty was free to do this because under Admiralty terms of employment 'established' workers could be transferred to any other naval dockyard without consultation.[54]

Hundreds of people attended a number of meetings in Cobh at which the problem was discussed, the first being in St. Colman's Cathedral and over 800 men, who attended were addressed by Bishop Michael Browne.[55] Bishop Browne presided over another meeting organised by Cobh U.D.C. at which it was agreed that the new government be approached with a view to taking over the yard.[56] In the meantime, Michael Collins took up the matter directly with Churchill and explained how 'consternation prevails among the men, almost

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[50] *Irish Independent*, 27 Jan. 1922.
[51] Draft cabinet memorandum, n.d.,, probably April, 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8640/115).
[52] Ibid.
[53] Admiralty telegram to Admiral, Queenstown Command, 2 Mar. 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8640/115); *Irish Times*, 27 Jan. 1922; *Cork Examiner*, 21 Jan. 1922.
[54] Draft cabinet memo, n.d., probably April, 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8640/115).
[55] *Irish Times*, 11 Jan. 1922.
[56] *Irish Times*, 6 Feb. 1922.

all of whom are married and have families.' He made a plea to Churchill to defer the decision 'for a month or so' to allow the Provisional Government to find some means of taking over the yard as a going concern.[57] Churchill granted an extension of one month, to the annoyance of Lord Lee, First Lord of the Admiralty, who complained that the agreed navy estimates did not include an extra month's expenditure, which he estimated to be £15,000, and that the Treasury had insisted that the extra cost be borne by the current navy vote.[58] Following these moves, the Provisional Government set up a committee comprised mainly of local businessmen to examine the commercial possibilities for the dockyard and to advise government.[59]

The Provisional Government decided fairly quickly that it would be to the benefit of the country to have an operational dockyard, providing skilled employment, and have the potential to be the basis of a shipbuilding industry. Its intentions were that the dockyard would be maintained as a 'National Shipyard'.[60] Agreement was reached with the British government to keep the dockyard open after Churchill's agreed extra month, on the understanding the Irish Free State would reimburse it for any expenditure incurred in keeping the yard open. The dockyard stayed open under these terms for another year while the two governments discussed terms for the yard to be taken over permanently. The title to the dockyard was not held by the Admiralty under provisions that would apply in normal commercial transactions. It was held under the Dockyards Regulation Act 1865, under which the monarch, in council, had complete control over terms of employment and how it could be used, and for the title to be passed to the Irish Free State it required the king, acting in council, to repeal the order as it applied to Haulbowline. This happened on 29 March 1923.[61]

While the Provisional Government agreed to reimburse the British government for its costs, it did not make any payment until the following year. As late as December 1922, Lord Devonshire, the Colonial Secretary, reminded T.M. Healy that the Irish Free State was still responsible for these costs, and

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[57] Collins, telegram to Churchill, 24 Jan. 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8640/115); Freeman's *Journal*, 3 Feb. 1922.
[58] Cabinet memorandum, 8 Mar. 1922 (TNA CAB 24/134).
[59] *Irish Independent*, 8 Mar. 1922; *Freeman's Journal*, 9 Mar. 1922.
[60] C. O'hUigínn, Minister for Economic Affairs, to Churchill, 7 Apr. 1922 (TNA, CO 739/3).
[61] Repeal of Order in Council, Buckingham Palace, 29 Mar. 1923 (TNA, ADM 1/8648/227).

advised him that the costs for the quarter ending in June 1922 had amounted to £24,271. The two single largest amounts were £4,048 for salaries of dockyard officers and staff and £14,435 for wages for dockyard workmen.[62] Devonshire added that the estimated costs for the two remaining quarters of the year were £25,000 each, and he requested payment of £75,000 as soon as possible.[63] He added another claim on 24 Jaunary 1924 for £12,000 to cover the costs of Royal Marines who had been retained to guard the premises.[64]

J. Brennan of the Department of Finance challenged several items, including the Royal Marine charge, and after negotiation the Royal Marine charge was dropped and a final figure of £54,630 was agreed by J.H. Thomas, who had succeeded Devonshire as Colonial Secretary just four weeks earlier.[65] The total value of property at Queenstown, including Admiralty House and the dockyard, that eventually passed to the Irish Free State was agreed at £927,834.[66] Other property that was transferred to the Irish Free State was the reservoir at Whitepoint, that had been owned by the Admiralty, which supplied water to Spike Island.[67] Under this agreement, Cobh UDC would continue to supply water to the island on the same terms as the War Department had charged the Admiralty. This was still the situation in 1936 when the Admiralty was paying £150 per year for up to 100,000 gallons of water, and this agreement remained until 1938.[68]

In October 1921 the Admiralty decided that it did not need to retain ownership of its two oil storage facilities at Rathmullen and Haulbowline. These could be released for sale to a commercial company provided that a specified minimum stock of fuel would be held at all times for Admiralty purposes.[69] This was a remarkable change in the policy it had proposed a year earlier. At a meeting of the Home Ports Defence Committee in June 1920, the Admiralty had put forward a proposal to build an oil storage facility, capable of holding 150,000 tons of fuel, on an abandoned kite and balloon station at

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[62] Admiralty to Colonial Office, 31 Oct. 1922 (TNA, CO 739/3).
[63] Devonshire to Healy, 22 Dec. 1922 (NAI, FIN 1/2699).
[64] Ibid., 24 Jan. 1924.
[65] Thomas to Healy, 23 Feb. 1924 (NAI, FIN 1/2699).
[66] Ormsby Gore to Healy 15 Apr. 1925 (NAI, FIN 1/2703).
[67] Devonshire to Healy 12 Mar. 1923; Cabinet Secretary to Healy 20 July 1923 (NAI, S2135).
[68] Chief Supt., Cork to Commissioner, 30 July 1936 (NAI, JUS 8/434).
[69] Lee, memorandum to cabinet, 15 Oct. 1920 (TNA, CAB 24/129).

Rathmullen on the western shore of Lough Swilly.[70] In effect, it was seeking permission to expand the storage capability that was already available to it because there already was one tank located in an old fort in the area. The proposal was not very well received by other members of the committee, with the possible exception of the Air Ministry representative, who was not too bothered where it would be built—it was too far from any likely enemy who might want to attack it by air—because all the military defence installations were on the eastern shore. The Admiralty's problem was that the western shore was much more accessible because the water there was much deeper than on the eastern shore. After much argument about the defensive problems of the proposed site it was agreed that the site be purchased and a twenty-six tank store be built.[71] Twelve months later, the Admiralty decided it did not need the facility.

The garrisons that manned the forts were two Special Reserve regiments of the RGA, the Cork RGA (SR) and the Antrim RGA (SR). These were disbanded after the war and replaced by regular heavy batteries of the RGA. However, because of the severe financial cutbacks in defence expenditures the War Office decided that all coastal defence installations in Britain would be manned by the Territorial Army, the local volunteer defence force of the British Army. This change came about in 1926 but because the Territorial Force Act of 1920 only applied in Great Britain, the forts in the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland continued to be manned by regular troops of the RGA.[72] The War Office sought to resolve what it saw as the unnecessary expense of having 'five regular heavy batteries locked in Ireland'.[73] Col. Clive Liddell, for the Director of Military Operations and Intelligence, suggested raising a supplementary reserve in Northern Ireland that would not necessitate the formation of a civil body such as would be needed to deal with a locally raised territorial unit.[74] However, Sir Harry Batterbee of the Dominions Office objected: 'If we were to allocate the business of coast defence in Northern Ireland to a locally raised corps, the Irish Free

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[70] Minutes of Home Ports Defence Committee, 29 June 1920 (TNA, CAB 12/1).
[71] Ibid., 15 Oct. 1920.
[72] Maurice-Jones, *The history of the Coast Artillery*, p.205
[73] Col. Clive.G. Liddell, Military Intelligence, memorandum to HDC, 4 Oct. 1928 (TNA, CAB 13/4).
[74] Ibid.

State might suggest that their own volunteer force, similarly raised, might provide the personnel for manning the three "Defended Ports" in the Free State.[75]

Batterbee also feared that the provision of locally raised troops in Northern Ireland might raise difficulties in Dublin and that the Irish Free State 'might possibly not accept with equanimity the development of a volunteer force in Northern Ireland'.[76] On the face of it, neither of these objections were likely possibilities, but even if the Irish Free State government were to have suggested providing manpower to replace British troops in the ports, they would have only been able to put forward a very weak argument to justify such an entitlement. With regard to Northern Ireland, the Irish Free State government was on even weaker ground: the War Office had a strong argument that they were entitled to have any imperial defence forces in Northern Ireland despite the Dominions Office's reservations, and the Anglo-Irish treaty specifically allocated the defence of the ports in the Irish Free State to Britain. Regardless of what the Irish government might have thought about the suggestion, the government of Northern Ireland was not apprised of the War Office's intentions and so had no input into the discussion.

No decision was taken on the matter but the War Office remained of the view that the formation of Territorial Army defence units for Belfast was the best solution. The War Office raised the matter a year later, without any objection from the Dominions Office, but this time the Northern Ireland government was consulted in advance, and they agreed to the proposition 'provided no local infantry units were formed'.[77] As one writer has observed: 'Obviously the Unionist government feared that if such units were formed not all those receiving training in small arms and infantry tactics would necessarily be unionist supporters.'[78] However, despite these decisions no progress was made in Belfast until 1937 when recruitment began for the two forts there.[79]

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[75] Minutes of Home Defence Committee, 5 Nov. 1928 (TNA, CAB 36/17); (TNA, CAB 12/2).
[76] Ibid.
[77] C.G. Liddell, Director of Military Intelligence, minute, 26 Oct. 1929 (TNA, CAB 13/4).
[78] Clements, *Defending the north*, pp 82-83.
[79] Ibid.

Although the system of coastal defence had been in operation for about 400 years, it was not until 1911 that the War Office drew up a manual detailing precisely the purpose and functions of coastal artillery.[80] Even though it was written by the War Office, this manual, perhaps unwittingly, confirmed the Royal Navy's role as the senior partner in the relationship by pointing out that coastal artillery only came into play when the navy had temporarily lost control in certain waters. It was then that coastal defence was needed to protect naval bases and commercial ports.

While there was close co-operation between the two services during the years of coastal fortifications there was also continual irritation in the Royal Artillery and the War Office at having to finance the defended anchorages while being the junior partner in decisions regarding their importance. These irritations transformed into differences of opinion about the value of the ports to the British after Irish independence.

Despite the numbers of coastal batteries that dotted the United Kingdom and their essential role in the country's overall defence plan, they saw relatively action in their 400 years existence. The Royal Navy had such dominance of the seas in those years that the garrisons only rarely had occasion to be directly involved in battle with enemy ships. Even during the First World War, when the Treaty Ports were of vital importance to the Allies, the heavy guns of Queenstown, Bere Island, and Lough Swilly were not called into action. After a couple of years of the Second World War the time for the forts had passed, overtaken by technology.

For the men of the Royal Garrison Artillery who served in the forts, both in Ireland and abroad, it was the end of a lifestyle that was marked by routine and boredom. A former Royal Artillery officer describes life in the forts:

> 'The history of the Coast Artillery must be one of lonely garrisons vegetating for years in distant ports and batteries, of changes in organisation, methods, armaments and fortification, and very rarely of the roar and smoke of battle and sudden death.'[81]

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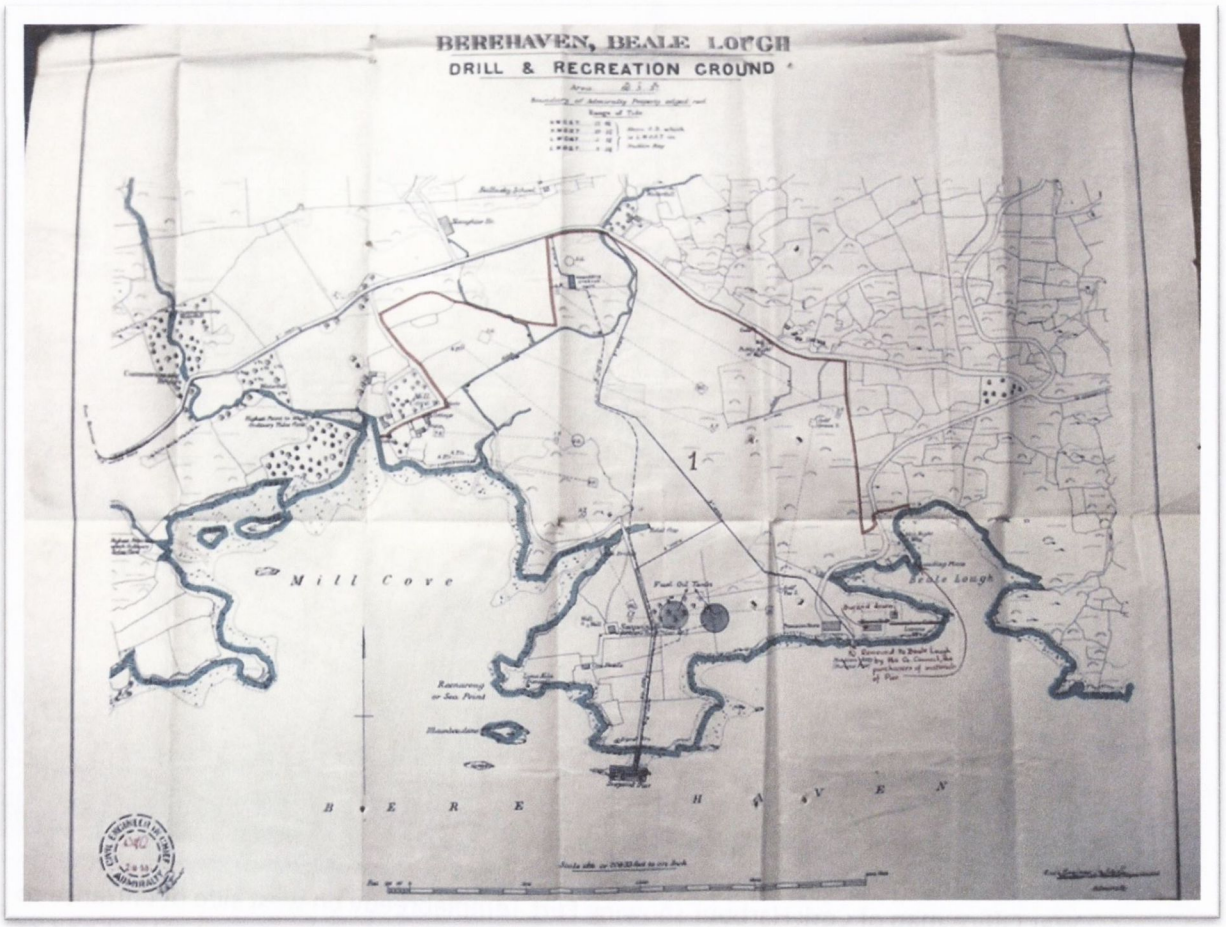
[80] War Office report, 'The organisation and fighting armament of a coast fortress or defended port', Jan. 1911 (TNA, WO 33/513).
[81] Maurice-Jones, *The history of coast artillery*, p. 3..

War Office map of Cork Harbour showing Fort Templebreedy on west side of entrance to channel; Fort Camden on west side end of channel; Fort Carlisle on east side at end of channel; Fort Westmoreland on Spike Island.

(Image: War Office file WO 32/5315).

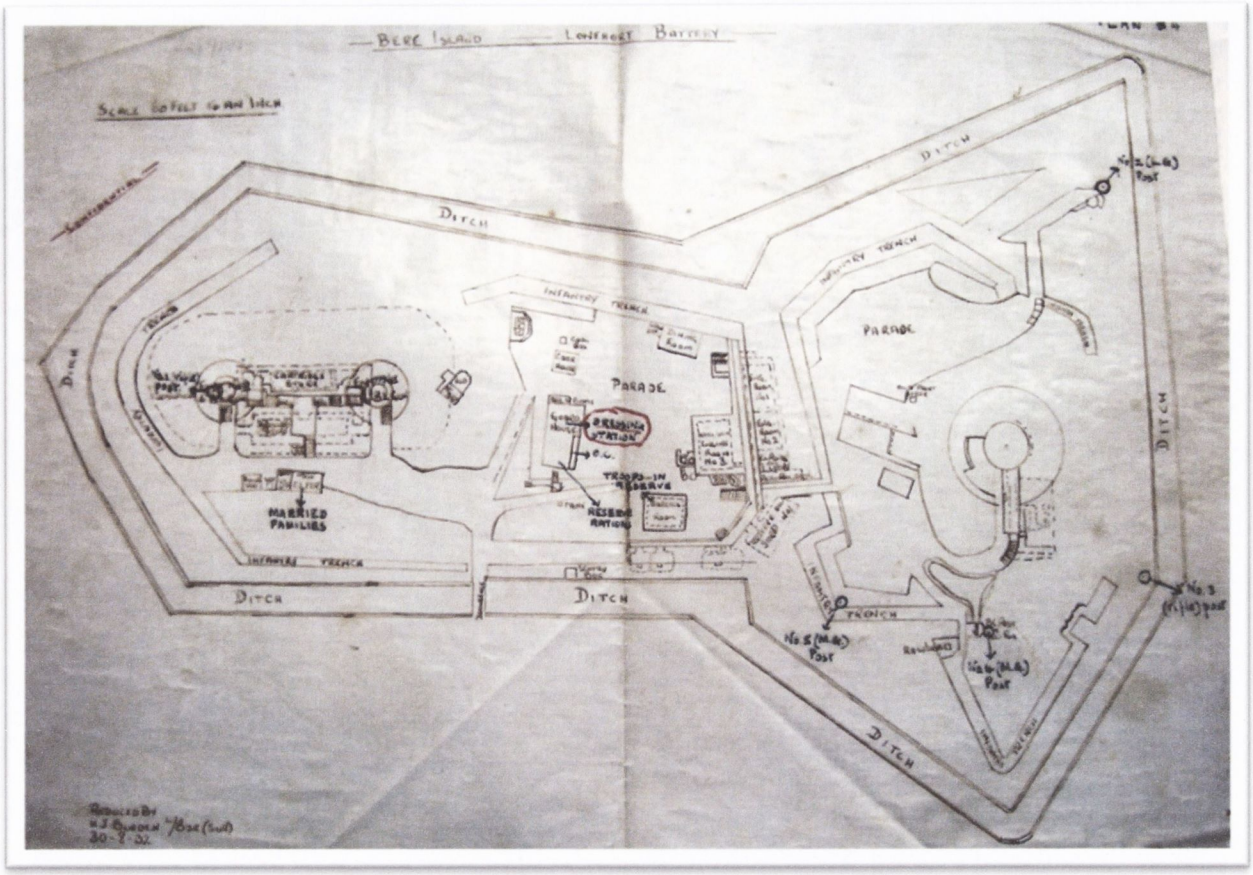
Map of Bere Island showing position of artillery batteries 1925. Ardnakinna battery, no longer in use at this time, was situated below Derrycreeveen battery.



(image: War Office file WO 32/5315)

Map showing Admiralty drill and recreation ground on mainland, due north of Bere Island c.1933-35

(image: Admiralty file ADM 1/8787)



War Office plan of Lonehort battery, Bere Island, August 1932.
(image: by kind permission Military Archives)

Map of Fort Dunree defences, Lough Swilly, 1934
(image: by kind permission Military Archives)

War Office map of Lough Swilly defences (*Image: War Office file WO/401)*

3 Treaty Negotiations: differing defence priorities

Having endured the four years of the First World War, the British government was immediately faced with the War of Independence in Ireland followed by the proclamation of the Irish Republic on 21 January 1921. The post-war slump in the British economy and the Geddes Committee's proposal to cut the British Army's budget from £98.5 million to £58.5 million for 1922-23[1] meant that the prospect of keeping 40,000 troops tied up indefinitely in Ireland forced Lloyd George to seek other solutions. He had a number of meetings with de Valera during the summer of 1921 which led to a truce and agreement for representatives of both sides to meet for negotiations on a settlement.

There were a number of matters that faced both sets of negotiators, but it is only the defence issues that are examined here, and the reasons for the agreement for British forces to remain in control of what became known as the Treaty Ports. The value of the ports had been proven during the First World War, so even if the British negotiators had been agreeable to vacating them neither the British public nor parliament would have allowed them to do so. The British government could not envisage a situation in which its western flank would be exposed so a British military and naval presence in any new state would be a *sine qua non.*

For Sinn Féin, the idea of British troops remaining on Irish soil was anathema, but for the Irish negotiators there were other matters that were even more important, notwithstanding how claims to be an independent republic would be compromised by a continuing British military presence. Nonetheless, while the objectives of Irish negotiators were the departure of all British forces from the country, the evidence shows that even they recognised that this was unlikely to happen.

When negotiations finally got underway in October in London there were five main issues that the two negotiating teams faced and on which agreement had to be reached: the oath of allegiance, Ulster, trade and finance, dominion status, and defence. All of these were important issues for both sides, but with one exception they were issues on which a degree of

[1] Report of Cabinet committee appointed to examine the Geddes report, Feb. 1922 (TNA, CAB 24/132).

compromise could be, and was, reached. The one issue on which the British were not prepared for any compromise was defence and even though the principle on which the British were arguing was conceded by the Irish negotiators relatively early in the negotiations, the subject permeated discussions of all other subjects.

The British negotiators were Lloyd George, Austen Chamberlain, Lord Birkenhead, Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, Sir Hamar Greenwood, and two senior civil servants, Thomas Jones and Lionel Curtis. On the Irish side were Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins, Robert Barton, Gavan Duffy, and Richard Duggan, with Erskine Childers, John Chartres, Diarmuid O'Hegarty, and Fionán Lynch providing the secretarial assistance.

The first meeting of the negotiators began at 11.00 am on 11 October. No serious discussion took place, both sides making general statements, but Lloyd George made it clear from the beginning that the issue of defence and access to the Irish ports by the Royal Navy was imperative and that air facilities were also essential, although he did seek to assure the Irish delegates that these facilities were not governed by a desire to control Irish affairs.[2] Lloyd George also presented the Irish delegates with a document of his proposals for a settlement that were broadly on the lines of the set of proposals he had sent to de Valera in July, which de Valera rejected.[3] The document emphasised the prime importance to the British government of dominion status and defence.

It is noteworthy that of the six conditions in Lloyd George's proposals the first four were directly related to defence, and they emphasised that Britain's defence needs must be accommodated in any settlement. Far from being a minor matter in the negotiations, defence was the first item on the British agenda,[4] and the Irish delegation quickly realised this. Griffith advised de Valera that, for the British government, 'this question of naval defence re

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[2] Pakenham, *Peace by ordeal*, pp 145-6.
[3] 'Proposals of the British government for an Irish settlement', 20 July 1921, in *Official correspondence relating to the peace negotiations June-September 1921* (UCC, Corpus of Electronic Texts) (www.ucc.ie/celt).)
[4] 'Proposals of the British government for an Irish settlement', 20 July 1921 (UCC, CELT).

the coasts of Ireland is a fixed idea of theirs – that they believe it vital to their lives.'[5]

The second plenary session was held later the same day. Lloyd George laid out his basic objectives for a defence agreement. As long as Britain was free to use the coast of Ireland and the seas around it for defence of the whole of the British Isles, he would give a guarantee that there would be no military domination of Ireland. With Britain having escaped narrowly from defeat in the Great War because of a failure to protect its western boundaries, he could not allow such a possibility to recur, and he emphasised this in his statement:

> If you want a guarantee that we intend no military domination that can easily be given, so long as we are free to use the coast of Ireland for the defence of the whole of these islands without a breach of the treaty. We do not wish to be in a position to always have to negotiate a fresh settlement or negotiate a treaty during a war.[6]

Lloyd George also made a suggestion, which was accepted by Collins, that the question of defence could best be dealt with by a smaller sub-committee of the delegates and their technical advisors.

British representatives on the defence sub-committee were Churchill, Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, Secretary of State for War, and Sir Hugh Trenchard, Chief of the Air Staff, Air Commodore J.H. Steel, Captain F.E. Guest, Captain B.E. Domvile, Vice Admiral Sir Osmond Brock, and Lt-Col. G.S. Stanley.[7] Childers' notes also include an Admiral Birch who is not recorded in the British minutes, and they omit Stanley.[8] Beatty also attended one informal conference session as an advisor to Churchill

The two Irish representatives were Michael Collins and Erskine Childers along with their advisors 'Comdt. Duffy; Comdt. [J.J.] O'Connell; Comdt. [Emmet] Dalton; with D[iarmuid].V. Hegarty'.[9] Collins was the dominant figure on the Irish side on matters of defence and he took the lead in the two meetings of the defence sub-committee that ensued. None of the Irish team had any expertise in strategic defensive matters except for Erskine Childers,

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[5] Griffith to de Valera, 11 Oct. 1921, in Catriona Crowe *et l,* (eds), *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy,* i, .274.
[6] Thomas Jones, *Whitehall Diary,* ed. Keith Middlemas (3 vols, London, 1971), iii, 120.
[7] Minutes of committee on naval and air defence, 17-18 Oct. 1921 (TNA, CAB 21/243).
[8] Notes on defence meetings 17-18 Oct. 1921 (TCD, Childers papers and diaries, MS 7803).
[9] Ibid.

and even this was limited. However, his experience in the Royal Navy and the RNAS was useful and his advice in discussions on army and naval matters could have been valuable.

Before the first meeting of this sub-committee the British delegates met to discuss their plans at 11.00 am on Thursday 13 October. There are incomplete minutes of the meeting so it is not known exactly who attended other than Churchill but Tom Jones' diary records that Lord Beatty was there.[10] The meeting was exclusively about naval defence and what position would be taken with the Irish delegates. Churchill told the delegates of the line he intended to adopt in discussions with the Irish delegation, in the light of a preliminary discussion he had had with Beatty, at a meeting of the Naval Defence Committee.[11]

In addition to retaining the ports, Churchill now proposed that the Attorney General, Gordon Hewart, be asked to re-draft British proposals by explicitly stating that there could be no question of allowing Ireland to have a navy of any kind, and by inserting words that would give Britain 'the free use *in peace or war* [italics added] for purposes of imperial defence, of any place for naval, military or air defence.' This took account of the Admiralty's C.P. 3409 memorandum but it went much further in that it now required the Irish state to allow the Royal Navy free access to any facility it needed in peacetime as well as war.[12] Tom Jones also recorded that they agreed that responsibility for the defence of Irish waters must remain with the Royal Navy in the interests of both Ireland and of general imperial defence.[13] There could be no possibility of the Royal Navy relinquishing any responsibility for the naval defence of the seas surrounding Ireland.

Jones made a surprising entry in his diary after this meeting in which he recorded how Churchill was struck by what little importance the Admiralty seemed to attach to the Irish stations. He wrote that 'There were a few guns at Bear Island. The Admiralty did not want Haulbowline. Beatty wanted one or two wireless stations'.[14] This diary entry suggests that the Admiralty were

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[10] Incomplete minutes of meeting at 11.00am on 13 Oct. 1921 (TNA, CAB 21/245).
[11] Jones, *Whitehall Diary,* 14 Oct. 1921, iii, 132.
[12] Minutes of meeting of British representatives, 13 Oct. 1921 (TNA, CAB 21/245).
[13] Jones, *Whitehall Diary,* 14 Oct. 1921, iii, 132.
[14] Ibid.

backtracking on their earlier insistence on retaining the ports. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Admiralty memorandum C.P. 3310 of September and their later memorandum C.P. 3409 stated that they were happy to relinquish most of their property in Ireland,[15] but this does not mean that they had little interest in retaining the ports. The Admiralty was insistent that this could not be the case. They had already stated on a number of occasions how important it was for them to have complete control over sea and coastal defence. As far as they were concerned, the ports were an part of Britain's defences.

As has been explained earlier, the British system of coastal defence for over two hundred years was that responsibility for providing the defended forts lay with the War Office. The Admiralty only ever had minimal property holdings at the ports. Consequently, Churchill need not have been quite so surprised at the Admiralty's response to the adequacy of the Berehaven defences. and, with a fleet no longer having to be stationed at Queenstown, there was now no need to retain ownership of the dockyard at Haulbowline. Also, improvements in wireless communication had resulted in fewer wireless stations being needed.

Later the same day the members of the defence sub-committee met for an informal discussion at the Colonial Office. Those present were Churchill and Beatty on one side and Collins and Childers on the other, and each side had a secretary to take notes.

Tim Pat Coogan and T. Ryle Dwyer give a descriptive account of the meeting, both describing Childers opening the proceedings with an address demonstrating how Ireland was 'no source of danger to England, but from the military standpoint is virtually useless...Take the matter of Irish bases for English submarine chasers. From the viewpoint of naval expediency Plymouth is a far better base than any port on the Irish coast.'[16] Dwyer quotes Collins as stating later: 'This announcement staggered me probably more than it did the other two...It was ridiculous balderdash. I felt like wanting to get out of the

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[15] Admiralty, cabinet memorandum, 19 Sept., 3 Oct. 1921 (TNA, CAB 24/128); (TNA, ADM 178/161).
[16] Tim Pat Coogan, *Michael Collins: a biography* (London, 1990), pp 243-4; T. Ryle Dwyer, *I signed my death warrant: Michael Collins and the treaty* (Cork, 2007), pp100-1.

room, but I naturally realised that I must make the pretence of standing by my colleagues.'[17]

The British minutes of the meeting differ from these descriptions. They record Churchill opening the meeting and asking Beatty to explain the British government needs for naval defence.[18] Beatty said that the naval requirements were demonstrated during the last war and, in contrast to Tom Jones's diary comment about the Admiralty's lack of interest in the ports, said that the British could not fight a naval war unless they controlled the Irish ports.[19] Childers challenged Beatty on most of his statements, restating how Irish neutrality would be adversely affected by them. Churchill replied that 'it was no use talking about neutrality. England would not accept it. Ireland could not be neutral. She could be inactive but England must have the right to defend Ireland as well as herself.' Beatty added: 'From a naval point of view it is a strategic necessity that we should have stations in Ireland for offensive and defensive purposes. Berehaven and the south-west of Ireland are absolutely essential to us.' Later in the discussions he spoke on the Admiralty's plans for the three ports and of their intention of disposing of all property except at Berehaven.[20] Property in this case meant coastguard stations, wireless and signal stations, and oil storage facilities around the country. The discussion turned to the question of an Irish navy and vessels it could likely have but it had already been made clear that this would not be tolerated by Britain.

Childers' idea of an Irish navy was for a small force of fast motor boats (on the style of U.S. revenue cutters) about one hundred feet long providing coastal defence and fisheries and revenue protection, while a fleet of trawlers would be used for mine laying and mine-sweeping.[21] However, other plans he had drawn up for the defence of Ireland against a foreign aggressor were different. These called for:

> a fleet of submarine cruisers, armed with torpedoes and light guns, capable of laying mines and equipped with wireless—a fleet of fast motor patrol boats, armed with torpedoes and

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[17] Dwyer, *I signed my death warrant,* pp100-01.
[18] Minutes of conversations of members of sub-committee on defence 13 Oct. 1921 (TNA, CAB 21/245).
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Childers, 'Defence memo No. 2', Oct. 1921 (TCD, Childers' papers and diaries, MS 7784/5/5).

> machine guns, capable of laying mines, equipped with wireless—an air force, including reconnaissance and bombing machines. [22]

When Churchill spoke about submarines Collins tried to explain to him that they did not feature in any Irish plans. As he put it: 'People in Ireland have no desire to build submarines, it would be a madcap thing,' to which Churchill replied that the right to build submarines would be regarded by everyone in England as a 'menace' that would not be tolerated.[23]

Collins asked about air stations and was informed by Beatty that they must be part of a defence against submarines and must be part of the overall plan. Childers asked again about coast stations [garrisons] and Churchill's reply was that they were necessary but the Curragh and other military 'cantonments' would go. Churchill summarised some of the points that had been raised during the meeting, referring again to the arrangement that Britain had come to with South Africa on the naval base at Simonstown; that nothing was wanted for the coercion of Ireland; but he reminded everyone that 'when the King declared war, everyone in the Dominions was at war.'[24] As J.J. Lee describes it: 'the metaphysical republicanism of the anti-treaty ultras was matched only by the metaphysical monarchism of the British.'[25]

During the discussion Churchill gave no indication that he was in the process of preparing a proposal requiring the Irish to allow the Royal Navy to have access to any naval facilities it needed in either war or peace.

The British delegates met again the following day at 1.30 pm in Downing Street, under the chairmanship of Lloyd George. Beatty did not take part in any subsequent negotiations as he had to leave to attend a naval disarmament conference in Washington. Churchill circulated his new proposal that Hewart had been asked to draw up, and after a brief discussion it was agreed that the British position would be:

> The Irish government confides the responsibility for the naval defence of Irish interests on the high seas to the Royal Navy and for this purpose as well as for those of general Imperial defence

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[22] Childers' memorandum, 'The defence of Ireland from foreign aggression', n.d. (TCD, Childers' papers and diaries, MS 7784/5/12).
[23] Minutes of conversations of members of sub-committee on defence, 13 Oct. 1921 (TNA, CAB 21/245).
[24] Ibid.
[25] J.J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-198: politics and society* (London, 1989), p. 51.

places its ports, harbours and inlets unreservedly at the disposal of the Imperial Government in peace or war.[26]

In addition, the Irish government was to be required to maintain the naval bases and 'any necessary expense in excess of what is necessary for purely Irish objects being recovered from the Imperial Government'. Churchill also added that this arrangement should continue 'until such time as transfer can be effected by mutual agreement in accordance with Canadian, Australian and South African precedents.'[27] This was part of the later British argument that in the cases of the three named dominions, they allowed Britain to maintain a naval presence for a number of years until each was in a position to have its own navy.

Of the members of the Irish delegation, Childers was the one who seemed to fully appreciate the broader significance of granting naval facilities in Ireland to the Royal Navy. He argued that such facilities would fatally undermine any aspirations to neutrality that the new state intended to adopt, and he made this point forcefully on a number of occasions.[28] Childers never fully understood the British need for naval facilities in Ireland, believing that alternative bases in Scotland and south-western England would be adequate for defence against submarines in the Western Approaches. He tried to convince Emmet Dalton that there was but one excuse for having bases in Ireland: 'that is for use as a "kicking off" position or refuelling point for an offensive war.'[29] In other words, the ports would be of benefit to Britain for offensive, but not defensive, purposes. However, a memorandum that he wrote on 18 October 1921 on behalf of the Irish representatives showed an appreciation of defence strategy that was very balanced. It was a detailed response to the proposals made by Churchill the previous day and it shows

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[26] Minutes of meeting of British representatives , 14 Oct. 1921 (TNA, CAB 21/243); Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, 14 Oct. 1921 iii, p. 132.
[27] Minutes of meeting of British representatives, 14 Oct. 1921 (TNA, CAB 21/243).
[28] 'Memorandum on Irish defence as affected by the British proposals of 20 July 1921', in Crowe, Catriona; Fanning, Ronan; Kennedy, Michael; Keogh, Dermot; O'Halpin, Eunan (eds), *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy*, i, 239; 'Memorandum by the Irish representatives on naval and air defence', 18 Oct. 1921, ibid, i, 280.
[29] Childers, memorandum to Dalton, 30 Aug. 1921 (TCD, Childers' papers and diaries, MS 7784-16/1).

considerable appreciation of the strategic military implications of the discussions, and of the increasing capability of modern destroyers.[30]

However, while Childers may have argued strongly against allowing any British military presence in the new state, he had already recognised that this would probably be inevitable and he seems to have been prepared for it. In a memorandum that he wrote in Dublin in July 1921 he stated: 'I regard the leasing of the specified ports as the extreme limit to which we shall go, under compulsion, in naval matters' and 'If we are bound to to lease the ports, no doubt Lough Swilly or Berehaven (not Cobh) would meet the case best.'[31] He was also of the opinion that Berehaven, in particular, would be of little value to the new state: 'Berehaven is to Ireland a place of quite minor importance, and could be leased without any yielding of national dignity.'[32] In the same memorandum he also advised: 'facilities for oiling, provisioning and coaling will of course be granted to the English fleet.'[33] He further advised that nothing would be lost by conceding the use of Irish aerodromes to the British or in allowing the RAF to have aerodromes in Ireland (on the basis that they could be spied upon and attacked quite easily).[34] Exactly how these concessions could be squared with his argument defending Irish neutrality, Childers did not say.

The first formal meeting of the sub-committee on defence was held on 17 October and copies of Churchill's new proposals on naval defence and the Admiralty's memorandum C.P. 3409 were circulated. Following a general discussion that included British statements on air facilities and recruiting, the meeting was adjourned until the following day when the Irish representatives would present a memorandum in reply to the British ones.[35] Childers' personal account of the meeting was that much of the discussion was about neutrality and Britain's need to retain the ports.[36]

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[30] 'Memorandum by the Irish Representatives for the sub-committee on naval and air defence', 18 July 1921, in *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy*, i, 278-82.
[31] 'Memorandum on Irish defence as affected by the British proposals of 20 July 1921', in *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy*, i, 246.
[32] Defence memorandum no. 2 for Irish delegation of plenipotentiaries, n.d., (TCD, Childers' papers and diaries, MS 7784).
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Minutes of sub-committee on defence, 17 Oct. 1921 (TNA, CAB 21/243).
[36] Notes on meetings 17 and 18 Oct. 1921 (TCD, Childers' papers and diaries, MS 7803).

The meeting resumed the following morning and the Irish reply to the British proposals was circulated. Their memorandum, which was Childers' handiwork, was a detailed, technical response that showed a good appreciation of the strategic and geopolitical implications of the proposals.[37] It is unlikely that any of the Irish team other than Childers could have produced such a document, and the fact that he had only a short time to prepare it only adds to its merit.

Childers opened by highlighting the inconsistency between the two British documents, and pointing out that the formula in the main (Churchill's) document went much beyond the specific requirements that the Admiralty deemed to be necessary in their document C.P. 3409. He refuted Churchill's claim that Ireland should confide responsibility for its own naval defence to Britain and pointed out that even the Admiralty did not call for Ireland's ports, harbours and inlets to be 'unreservedly at the disposal of the Imperial government in peace or war'.[38] He emphasised that both sets of proposals were wholly inconsistent with the neutral status that Ireland was adopting and that there was no necessity for Britain to have access to any Irish ports because there was no European power that would be able to undertake war with Britain in the foreseeable future. Childers used the opportunity to repeat his request to see a copy of the agreement between Britain and South Africa on the Royal Navy vacating its naval base at Simonstown, but he concentrated on the neutrality issue and on how British demands were incompatible with it. He also pointed out that British proposals on coastal air defence were vague in that it was not stated if facilities were being demanded in war, or peace, or both, and that no sites were specified for them.[39]

Both Collins and Childers rejected the Admiralty argument on the need for the Royal Navy to retain any bases in Ireland, on the grounds that the increasing range and power of modern destroyers would enable Britain to provide protection for commercial shipping from the southwest of England and the north-west of Scotland. This argument was substantially the same as that put forward by de Valera during his discussions with Chamberlain in 1938.

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[37] Memorandum on defence by the Irish representatives, 18 Oct. 1921 (TNA, CAB 21/243 and ADM 1/8612/175); *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, i, 278-92
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid. pp 278-82.

The essential part of the argument was that technology had greatly diminished the strategic importance of the treaty ports, an argument that was disputed by the Admiralty. One of the points made by the Naval Staff, in their response to the Irish defence memorandum, was that it had been shown in the last war that modern warships cannot stay at sea for long periods at a time, and their best chance of engaging with the enemy was to lie at a base as close as possible to the most likely danger point.[40]

The meeting concluded without any agreement being reached. The British delegates discussed the Irish memorandum later that day. They identified the neutrality issue as being at the heart of the Irish arguments but believed that if the Irish could be reassured on this point, Britain's defence requirements could be met.[41]

They decided to send a copy of a memorandum on dominion status that had been written by Lionel Curtis to the Irish representatives in the hope that it would better inform them on the constitutional position of the dominions and how dominion status would affect Ireland. They also decided that until this matter was finalised they would not accede to Childers' requests to see the terms of the Simonstown agreement, because 'it would be premature' to do so, even though they had already told him that they would send him a copy.[42]

Curtis's memorandum starts: 'Dominion status cannot be defined. It can only be described' and then points out that all of the British dominions were free to have their own naval forces both before and after they had dominion status.[43] It also points out that the British government was in the process of relinquishing its naval bases in Simonstown and Cape Town and was allowing South Africa to establish a navy of its own. It is difficult to fathom why the British representatives were so wary of letting Collins and Childers have any information about the details of the type of navy that they were allowing the South African government. They could have used the opportunity as a demonstration of their good faith in handing over naval defence responsibilities to a dominion as they had always agreed they would and as they had done with Australia and Canada. (The new South African

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[40] Naval Staff memorandum to British representatives, 18 Oct. 1921 (TNA, CAB 21/242).
[41] Minutes of meeting of British representatives, 18 Oct. 1921 (TNA, CAB 21/243).
[42] Ibid.
[43] Memorandum on dominion status by Lional Curtis, 17 Oct. 1921 (TNA, CAB 21/243).

navy was established a few months later on 1 April 1922 with the acquisition of three minesweepers—the nucleus of a force that never expanded, and eventually collapsed in 1933 during the Great Depression).[44] Nevertheless, both countries were far away, and there was no likelihood that the Admiralty would ever agree to relinquish any control over sea defences so close to home.[45] Also, as the Naval Staff pointed out, there never had been the slightest risk of war with Canada or Australia whereas 'war in its most deplorable forms has again broken out between the British and Irish people.'[46]

Childers' response to Curtis's memorandum was relatively short and very specific. Among the points he raised were: the conditions being laid down for specific ports in Ireland in peacetime had no parallel in the dominions; there were no British forces in occupation in any of the dominions; that no dominion would entertain the idea of the Admiralty having the power to acquire any property it deemed necessary in time of war or 'strained relations' and to exercise undivided control over its waters; to prohibit having a navy of any type.[47] The British response, as always to these points, was that the Royal Navy did have a presence in these ports until the countries were in a position to take on the responsibility themselves.

However, despite Irish protestations and their insistence on maintaining neutrality in the face of proposed British occupation of the ports, the Irish representatives seem to have accepted that this was a matter on which they would have to compromise. Indeed, following the very first plenary meeting of the two teams on 11 October, Griffith indicated his feelings when he came away convinced that the British were not going to relinquish control over naval defence: 'they believe it vital to their lives.'[48] He seems to have confirmed this three days later when, in a memorandum to de Valera after the preliminary meeting on defence, he stated that only two matters remained

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[44] History of the South African Navy, n.d., (South African Navy website, www. navy.mil.za), (accessed 22 Oct. 2010).
[45] Remarks by the Naval Staff on the memorandum by the Irish representatives, 18 Oct. 1921 (CAB, 21/243 part II).
[46] Ibid.
[47] Memorandum by Erskine Childers replying to British proposals, 20 Oct. 1921, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, i, 284.
[48] Arthur Griffith to de Valera, 11 Oct. 1921, ibid., i, p. 274.

outstanding: Ulster and the Crown.[49] To his mind, defence and the ports were settled.

The preliminary meeting on defence between the representatives was exploratory in content but it indicated an Irish attitude that was less than forceful, and, despite Childers' later vigorous arguments, there is an impression that the principle that the British were arguing had been conceded and that what remained were the details of a compromise. Childers himself conceded this point in a Dáil speech in which he strongly attacked the treaty but even though he refused to make any concessions on defence either to the British or to his own colleagues, he stated:

> There is not the slightest doubt in negotiating with England it [a concession] had to be made and has to be made. They feel tremendously on the subject of defence and the question before any one negotiating with them would be to meet them in that respect, to meet them without sacrificing the national status and without formally giving up what is the fundamental right of every free nation.[50]

He argued that clauses seven and eight of de Valera's Document No. 2 should answer Britain's needs. The essential part of clause eight granted Britain the same harbour facilities and defence rights in both war and peace as had been granted in the Articles of Agreement, but with the proviso that they be handed back to Ireland after five years, unless some other defence agreement was mutually agreed between the two governments.[51]

The Irish representatives finally accepted that naval and air defence of the Irish coasts was a matter of common concern to the two countries, and accordingly on 29 October they formally agreed that in return for a guarantee:

> that there shall be no armed occupation of Irish soil, the British Government should have, under licence from the Irish Government, such coastal facilities as may be agreed to be necessary, until Ireland shall be in a position to provide the defence and protection itself.[52]

Other defence matters were finalised a couple of days later at a meeting attended by Collins and Griffith, and Churchill, Lloyd George, and Birkenhead. At this meeting Lloyd George emphasised how three things were

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[49] Arthur Griffith to de Valera, 14 Oct. 1921, ibid., i, pp 275-6.
[50] Erskine Childers, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, *t*, col.167, 15 Dec. 1921.
[51] Eamon de Valera, 'Document number two', undated (www.ucc.ie/celt).
[52] Memorandum by the Irish delegation, 29 Oct. 1921, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, i, p. 297.

vital to Britain, namely, the crown, the empire, and the navy.[53] Griffith complained that a new demand was being placed in that Ireland was now being denied the right to have an air force, but Lloyd George assured him that that point would not be pressed. Griffith also objected to the prohibition on Ireland being permitted a navy, and Lloyd George conceded that this would not include revenue craft and gunboats, but he did hope it would exclude mine-layers. Griffith wanted a specific time frame for these conditions but Lloyd George felt it would be better for this to be decided by mutual agreement.[54] Griffith confirmed the verbal agreement in a letter to Lloyd George on 2 November stating:

> I agreed consequently to recommend that the British Navy should be afforded such coastal facilities as may be necessary pending an agreement similar to those made with the Dominions providing for the assumption by Ireland of her own coastal defence.[55]

This did not finalise the matter of defence. It arose in some form at most of the subsequent meetings, but the principle had been conceded and there was no withdrawal. Whenever there were discussions on the topics of the crown, the oath, empire, and neutrality, naval defence almost inevitably came into the debate. Childers continued to write memorandums and to rail at Griffith's and Collins' negotiation tactics, despite having accepted before the negotiations started that he foresaw the likelihood of granting facilities to the Royal Navy. Even as late as 7 November he was still arguing against granting the navy control over defence of the ports and to facilities for naval aircraft onshore.[56] However, while Collins and Childers appreciated how Irish neutrality would be adversely affected by a British military presence in Ireland, the issue does not appear to have been central to the discussions at any subsequent meetings.

Subsequent discussions and correspondence were essentially 'give and take' bargaining stances taken by both parties dealing with the wording of a defence agreement. Matters began to come to a head on 16 November when Tom Jones presented Griffith with detailed suggestions for a draft

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[53] Memorandum of meeting at Churchill's house, 30 Oct. 1921, ibid., i, pp 298-99.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Griffith letter to Lloyd George, 2 Nov. 1921, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, i, p. 299.
[56] Extracts from a memorandum by Erskine Childers, 7 Nov. 1921, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, i, 301-304.

agreement.[57] The defence clauses were close to the terms in the final articles of agreement, but the Irish delegation took issue with a number of them. They agreed to granting harbour and other facilities in time of peace and other facilities as may from time to time be agreed, and also 'in time of war such harbour and other facilities as the British government may require for the purpose of such defence' for a period of five years.[58] They also agreed to the inclusion of the term 'local military defence force' suggested in Tom Jones's list of suggestions, which is surprising because Collins was very pleased that he was able to persuade Lloyd George to drop the word 'local' in some last-minute concessions before the treaty was finally signed. A local defence force is essentially a part-time army, like the British Territorial Army, and it would have been wholly unrealistic for an Irish government to be expected to maintain control of the country with such a force. The final agreement allowed Ireland to raise an army of a size that would be in proportion to the overall population of the country as Britain's army was to its population. Why the British insisted on this restriction is difficult to understand because the largest army that could be raised in Ireland could never present a threat to Britain.[59] The following day, during discussions between Collins and Lloyd George, Collins took issue with the wording of a defence clause that gave the right of coastal defence 'exclusively' to the Royal Navy. He informed him that if this could be dropped, and the principle that Ireland could not build any naval vessels be dropped along with an understanding that the agreement to review coastal defence after ten years meant, in effect, the transfer of coastal defence to the Irish Free State, then they could find agreement on defence.[60]

The final Articles of Agreement took note of some of these points. The word 'exclusively' was dropped; the Irish Free State could build ships for revenue and for fisheries protection; and there would be a conference at the

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[57] Jones to Griffith, 'Tentative suggestions' for a treaty, 16 Nov. 1921, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, i, 309-10.
[58] Amendments by the Irish Representatives to the Articles of Agreement, 4 Dec. 1921, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, i, pp 246-48.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Memorandum of interview between Michael Collins and David Lloyd George, 5 Dec. 1921, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, i, p. 350.

end of five years to review naval defence policy 'with a view to the undertaking by Ireland of a share in her own coastal defence'.[61]

The Admiralty was furious at the naval provisions of the final agreement and Admiral G. Dickens, Director of Planning, lost no time in making the cabinet aware of their feelings. He did so, but in diplomatic terms, making it clear that the final terms were not in accordance with the provisions that they considered as 'indispensable to Naval requirements'.[62] They were particularly incensed by the agreement to allow the Irish Free State to be involved in revenue and fisheries protection or ever to have a part to play in coastal defence. Dickens had highlighted the fact that the Admiralty had advised the cabinet on several occasions that, 'Britain alone should control the sea around Ireland, and never envisaged any future arrangement whereby Ireland would undertake her own coastal defence.'[63] The letter was considered by a cabinet committee who simply advised the Admiralty that, in their opinion, the terms of the treaty covered their concerns as listed in their memorandum of 16 September [C.P. 3409].[64]

The War Office adopted a more pragmatic approach to the negotiations, recognising that most of the problems of manning and maintaining defensive positions would be theirs—and most of the costs would come from their budget. Most of the costs associated with maintaining the defences were the War Office's responsibility and this was always the main reason behind their argument against retaining the forts. They also recognised the possibility that if Britain were to be involved in another war with a European enemy it could end up having to defend its bases not only from a seaward attack by the enemy, but also from a land-based attack from dissident Irish. While the negotiations were in progress, the War Office was also in discussion with the Geddes committee that had been set up to examine national expenditure in the light of the country's serious financial predicament after the war. The committee published part one of its report, on defence spending, in late 1921, and it proposed swingeing cuts in expenditure that dismayed the armed services. Among the committee's recommendations were that the Admiralty

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[61] Articles of Agreement of Anglo-Irish Treaty, 6 Dec 1921 (NAI, DE 2/304/1).
[62] Admiralty to cabinet secretary, 8 Dec. 1921 (TNA, ADM 116/2148).
[63] Dickens, memorandum to cabinet-, 7 Dec. 1921 (TNA, ADM 116/2148).
[64] R.B. Howarth, Asst. Cabinet Secretary to Admiralty, 29 Dec. 1921 (TNA, CAB 3/3).

abolish the Western Command; it confirmed the decision to close Haulbowline; it also recommended that two air squadrons that had been allocated to the army in Ireland be withdrawn.[65]

Despite these financial distractions, the British delegates maintained their demand for full control over defence in Irish territorial waters, and defence matters appear to have been finalised relatively easily by the two parties, even though the final wording on defence was not finalised until the last day of negotiations on 6 December. Their minds were more concerned with the question of Ulster, finance, trade, and the problem that proved to be the most intractable: the oath of allegiance and the crown. For the Irish delegates, problems in agreeing to the military aspect of the treaty were eased with the understanding that it would be reviewed after five years.

While it was unsatisfactory, for ideological reasons, for the Irish negotiators to agree to the Royal Navy maintaining responsibility for the defence of Irish coastal waters, there was no possibility of the new state being able to afford the luxury of building and maintaining a navy of any consequence. However, Robert Barton, one of the negotiators, recorded that there had been a long discussion between Collins, himself, and Churchill about what ships should be allowed to be built.[66] Collins had sought an agreement for Ireland to be able to 'build one or more ships for coastal protection,' but 'this was absolutely opposed' by Churchill who would only concede to revenue and fishery protection ships.[67] Churchill insisted that if Ireland were permitted to have a navy it would not be possible to get the treaty through parliament, and he made it clear to Collins and Dalton that not only would he oppose any provision that allowed the Irish Free State to have a navy but he would oppose it in five years' time when the treaty was to be reviewed, if he had an opportunity.[68]

Churchill's position is understandable because considerable concern had been expressed in Westminster about any concession to Ireland that would increase Ireland's naval capacity or restrict Britain's. Even in the

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[65] Report of Cabinet committee appointed to examine the Geddes report, Feb. 1922 (TNA, CAB 24/132).
[66] Notes by Robert Barton of the two sub-conferences held on 5/6 Dec. 1921, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, i, 271-274.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.

Government of Ireland Bill of 1920, the government speakers had difficulty in reassuring members of all parties that they could not, under any circumstances, give an Irish parliament any permission to have either an army or a navy.[69] The opposition argument was that it would be impossible to confer 'dominion status' on Ireland – similar to that enjoyed by Britain's other dominions – without preventing Ireland from creating an army or a navy of its own, regardless of what might be in any agreement.[70] Viscount Grey's argument was that it was one thing for the other dominions, thousands of miles away, to have a navy, but it was quite another for Ireland being so close to Britain, and so there could be no question of there being two navies.[71]

Churchill and Lloyd George had other problems to contend with during the negotiations. Lloyd George, although the prime minister, was the leader of a minority government comprising the two elements of the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party. By this time his post-war popularity was on the wane and by 1921 a considerable amount of friction had arisen between the Conservatives, under Bonar Law, and the Liberals. There was a strong element within the party that had come out solidly in favour of a strong military response to the War of Independence in Ireland and was against any thought of negotiating with the I.R.A. These problems became acute for Lloyd George (and for Churchill) at a critical time in the negotiations.

The Conservative Party conference was held in Liverpool during the third week in November 1921, and the main item of contention was whether or not the party should continue with the coalition government or withdraw from it and face a general election. Government policy on Ireland featured strongly in the debate. The debate on policy in Ireland was held on 17th November, and there were four strongly worded motions on the agenda condemning the government's negotiating tactics on defence and were intended to prevent not just any concessions being made that would reduce the navy's defence capability, but also to prevent an Irish government from creating even a part-time territorial army.[72] However, background

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[69] Lord Chancellor, *Hansard 5 (Lords)*, 23 Nov. 1920, xxxxii, cols. 446-7.
[70] Marquess of Londonderry, *Hansard 5 (Lords)*, 24 Nov. 1920, xxxxii, col.550.
[71] Viscount Grey, *Hansard 5 (Lords)*, 24 Nov. 1920, xxxxii, cols. 516-7.
[72] Records of Conservative and Unionist Party conference, 17 Nov. 1921 (Bodleian Library, NUA 2/2/6).

manoeuvring by senior party members resulted in three of the motions being withdrawn and the fourth being reworded.[73]

The matter was a close run thing and if all of the motions had been passed, the Conservative members of the negotiating team, Worthington-Evans, Chamberlain, and Birkenhead (Churchill did not return to the Conservative party till 1924) would have been under immense pressure not to have settled for the terms that were finally agreed.

In the House of Commons debate on the treaty on 15 December 1921 there was strong opposition from the Tory Die-Hards. Col. John Gretton was a strong opponent of any military concessions being made, particularly as there was to be no oath of allegiance to the king. He also voiced a concern that was raised by others – that of submarines. None of the speakers believed that Ireland could ever have a navy that would pose a serious threat to the Royal Navy, but they all foresaw the possibility of Ireland being able to purchase submarines cheaply, and Gretton argued that that 'there is no part of the world where submarines may be readily harboured, more easily hidden, and operated with more effect than off the coast of Ireland'.[74] Even Churchill had difficulty in convincing members that article 7 of the treaty meant what it said: that the Royal Navy would have sole authority for defending the seas around Britain and Ireland.[75] The opposition claim was that the agreed review in five years' time would inevitably mean that this clause would lapse.[76] Surprisingly, there was no discussion on the consequences for the new state, or for Britain, if the state were to formally declare its political status to be neutral in international affairs. Indeed, it was not until a year later, when the new constitution for the Irish Free State was being debated in Westminster that the anomaly in the agreement was highlighted – and by just one person.

Lt-Col. Martin Archer-Shee, a Conservative with a staunch imperialist outlook, argued that Article 7 allowed Britain to occupy any ports in Ireland in time of war, but that if Britain were to do so it would negate Ireland's claim to being a neutral country and bring her into the war as a belligerent on Britain's

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[73] Minutes of Conservative and Unionist Party conference, 17 Nov. 1921 (Bodleian Library, NUA 2/1/37).
[74] John Gretton, *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, 15 Dec. 1921, cxxxxix, col. 148.
[75] Winston Churchill, *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, 15 Dec. 1921, cxxxxix, cols. 174-178.
[76] Gretton, *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, 15 Dec. 1921, cxxxxix, cols. 251-2.

side. This, he pointed out, contradicted article 49 of the Irish constitution which declared that the state shall not be committed in active participation in any war without the consent of the Oireachtas.[77] Despite this, he insisted that Britain must have access to all harbour facilities in Ireland when it needed them and that the Oireachtas could not retain the right to decide when to go to war.

Notwithstanding all the concern expressed by those opposed to the defence terms of the treaty there was never a likelihood that Britain would relinquish its control over the seas surrounding Ireland, or to allow Ireland to have a navy of its own. The memory of the Great War was still too fresh in people's minds for Lloyd George, or any prime minister, to make further concessions that could be seen to compromise the Britain's defences. The treaty was stated to grant Ireland full dominion status, on the same lines as Canada, but it was never the British intention for this to include defence rights. This was admitted by Lloyd George in the Commons in a speech in which he tried to allay the fears of those who argued that the defence of the empire was being put at risk:

> With regard to the navy we felt that we could not allow the ordinary working of Dominion status to operate. Here we had the experience of the late War, which showed how vital Ireland was to the security of this country. The access to our ports is along the coasts of Ireland. For offence or defence, Ireland is a post which is a key in many respects, and though I agree that Ireland is never likely to raise a great formidable Navy which will challenge us upon the seas, I would remind the House that minelayers and submarines do not cost much, and that they were our trouble mostly in the War. Then as to naval accessibility to the ports of Ireland. The use of coastal positions for the defence of commerce and the British Islands in time of war is vital. We could not leave that merely to good will, or to the general interpretation of vague conditions of the Treaty...where the security of these islands was concerned, we must leave nothing to chance.[78]

In the final Articles of Agreement, Britain retained rights over the four named ports (Belfast was included in the agreement but the Government of Ireland Act 1920 had effectively killed off the possibility of this happening) for a small number of British troops to be stationed there as 'care and

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[77] Martin Archer-Shee, *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, 28 Dec. 1921, clix, cols. 549-53.
[78] Lloyd George, *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, 14 Dec. 1921, cxxxix, col. 35.

maintenance parties'. Collins did manage to wrest a substantial concession when it was agreed that the British army would evacuate the twenty-six counties and the final concession, by which Ireland would be allowed to form its own army, was very important. These were significant moves for both practical and psychological reasons. British rule in Ireland was seen to depend on the presence of the army, and without the army Britain's ability to influence future Irish governments would be gone. This was certainly Collins' reading of the situation. His Dáil statement on 19 December 1921 emphasises this point:

> Now it was not by any form of communication except through their military strength that the English held this country. That is simply a plain fact which, I think, nobody will deny. It wasn't by any forms of government, it wasn't by their judiciary or anything of that kind. These people could not operate except for the military strength that was always there. Now, starting from that, I maintain that the disappearance of that military strength gives us the chief proof that our national liberties are established.[79]

The debate in the Dáil was bitter and acrimonious. Republicans, on one side, slated the inclusion in the treaty of the oath, the crown, the governor-general, the ports and anything that retained an association with Britain. On the other side, supporters of the treaty concentrated on the practicalities that would ensue: control over finance, an independent Dáil, education, withdrawal of the British army, the creation of a new national army.[80] However, while they did recognise the treaty's limitations, they also recognised that it provided for much more than had been agreed for under Home Rule. Their position was rationalised by Collins in a statement that has come to signify what the treaty meant to him and a summation of his fundamental reasons for signing it: 'In my opinion it gives us freedom, not the ultimate freedom that all nations desire and develop to, but the freedom to achieve it.'[81]

During the debate, there was considerable mention of the ports but there was little appreciation of the consequences for the position of neutrality that the new state intended to adopt. Even Collins' statement suggests that he may not have recognised the full implications of the concessions to Britain, or if he did he chose not to voice them:

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[79] Michael Collins, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, *t*, col. 33, 19 Dec. 1921.
[80] Knirck, *Imagining Irish independence*, pp 129, 131.
[81] Michael Collins, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, *t*, col. 32, 19 Dec. 1921.

> If we stood alone, the occupation of the ports might probably be a danger to us. Associated in a free partnership with these other nations [the newly styled 'Community of Nations known as the British Empire'] it is not a danger, for their association is a guarantee that it won't be used as a jumping-off ground against us.[82]

This accepted that the new state remained dependent on others for its defence and was not independent in formulating its foreign policies.

Richard Mulcahy (Chief of Staff) did not believe the ports to be of immediate significance and maintained that the Irish Free State would not be in a position to defend the ports from an enemy attack because priority had to be given to establishing a police force and a small defence force.[83] J.P. Walshe was unhappy because he disliked British retention of the ports for the simple reason that 'nobody has told me how we are to rid ourselves of that.'[84] Donal Buckley's main grievance was that British occupation of the ports would mean the Union Jack, 'the symbol of slavery will float over each of these strongholds.'[85] Desmond FitzGerald accepted that the occupation meant 'a certain limitation of sovereignty' but not to a degree that would be of concern.[86] Even Cathal Brugha, in his vehement denunciation of the treaty mentioned the ports only indirectly.[87] One TD, P.S. Hogan adopted a more practical attitude:

> I am not going into the question now as to whether the possession or the occupation by a few marines under the guns of our Army of a few ports of Ireland as a military proposition makes a terrible difference.[88]

Just one TD, Erskine Childers, spoke convincingly on the dangers in conceding the ports and he put forward a compelling argument against them. While he did not specifically mention any danger that the occupation of the ports might mean for Irish neutrality, he did highlight the dangers of granting such harbour and other facilities as the British government might require in time of war, and how this would mean that the Irish Free State would have no control over its own defences, unlike any of the dominions in the empire. His

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[82] Ibid.
[83] Richard Mulcahy, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, *t*, cols 143-4, 22 Dec. 1921.
[84] J.J. Walsh, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, *t*, col. 186, 3 Jan. 1922.
[85] Donal Buckley, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, *t*, col. 213, 4 Jan. 1922.
[86] Desmond FitzGerald, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, *t*, col. 236, 4 Jan. 1922
[87] Cathal Brugha, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, *t*, passim, 7 Jan. 1922.
[88] P.S. Hogan, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, *t*, col. 64, 20 Dec. 1921.

main point was that military defence must be under one authority – it could not be split under two governments – and by giving responsibility for coastal defence to Britain it inevitably meant that the defence of the whole island would rest with Britain.[89] None of the TDs recognised that the greatest danger in agreeing to British military control and occupation of the ports would be if Britain were to become engaged in war, when there would be a strong likelihood of the enemy attacking British forces anywhere they were located and ignoring the Irish Free State's claims to be a non-combatant. This was the danger that de Valera foresaw when he started his negotiations with Chamberlain for the return of the ports twelve years later.

The defence aspects of the treaty negotiations were conducted against a background of an awareness in military and political circles in London of just how close Britain had come to being defeated in the war in the Atlantic, and how much the naval facilities in the three Treaty Ports had contributed to eventual success. In this situation, it was inconceivable that the British government would have agreed to the Royal Navy being obliged to vacate the ports. Not only would parliament have rejected any such move but the people would not have accepted it.

For centuries, the Royal Navy had been, and was seen to be, the country's first line of defence, so any weakening of that defence would not have been tolerated so soon after the First World War. This was recognised by the Irish negotiators, and it explains why their opposition to the defence clauses of the treaty was less forceful than their opposition to the more ideological aspects of the treaty. They could also point out to their colleagues at home that their consent to an ongoing British military presence in the country was not permanent and could be withdrawn when the military aspects of the treaty were reviewed in five years.

Unfortunately, while the majority of TDs, and the general population, were willing to accept the terms despite some misgivings, de Valera and his hard-line colleagues refused to do so, leading to a course of events that led to civil war.

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[89] Erskine Childers, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, *t*, cols 37-9, 19 Dec. 1921.

4 British Destroyers in the Irish Civil War

Most of the history of the Civil War has focussed on its political consequences and on the ideological and physical conflict between the opposing sides in the war. Much attention has also been given to the support given by the British government to the Provisional Government by way of arms and ammunition that were supplied through the British Army. The army itself kept a fairly low profile during the course of the war, being confined to barracks for most of the time. The Royal Navy, however, had anything but a low profile and its activities brought it into close contact with the conflict but little has been written about this.[1] The navy's role was quite extensive and it included the prevention of gun-running, relieving coastguard stations, and rescuing loyalist people who feared that their lives were in danger. Less well-known, however, is the extent of the assistance that the navy gave to the new National Army. This chapter examines how the navy's assistance went beyond supplying ammunition and arms when requested, to being directly involved with units of the National Army in conflicts against the anti-Treaty forces.

When the treaty was implemented there were two naval commands in Ireland, the Western Approaches Command, under Vice Admiral E.F. Gaunt, which had been transferred to Buncrana from Queenstown after the First World War, and Kingstown (Dun Laoghaire), under Rear Admiral Cecil Fox. The number of ships in the commands, formally referred to as the 'Local Defence organisation' was considerably reduced from its former high and by April 1922 it stood at 1 sloop, 3 destroyers, 6 trawlers, and 2 drifters.[2]

The Admiralty plan from 1922 was to scrap the commands at Buncrana and Kingstown and to have all ships in Irish waters come under the command of the C-in-C, Plymouth (Devonport) and possibly to have the three destroyers based on Pembroke, in Wales.[3] Unfortunately for the Admiralty, any hopes of implementing these plans were overcome by changing circumstances. The Civil War, which had been increasing in intensity since the beginning of the year, forced the Admiralty to postpone its plans. There was increasing conflict

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[1] John Linge, 'The Royal Navy and the Irish Civil War', in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxxi (1998-9).
[2] C-in-C., Plymouth minute to Admiralty, 9 Apr. 1922 (TNA, ADM 8652/253).
[3] Admiralty minute, 9 Apr. 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).

in Ulster and reports were reaching Dublin of serious attacks on Protestants in Belfast.[4] Admiral Gaunt became very concerned about the situation in Ulster and he advised the Admiralty on 29 April that the situation was so bad that he needed a minimum of an extra five destroyers and two auxiliary ships 'for protective services, and 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 Royalists from Southern sea ports.'[5]

However, Gaunt was informed on 20 May that his command in Buncrana was being terminated and that Capt. Hugh G.C. Somerville was being appointed Senior Naval Officer (SNO), Haulbowline, under the command of the C-in-C, Plymouth, Admiral Sir M. Browning.[6] Somerville's appointment at such a difficult time was inspired. He was the ideal officer for his post because, having been born and raised in Castletownshend, Cork, in a family that had a long history of naval and military service he understood local matters better than any English officer could have done. Also, another SNO of non-flag rank was appointed to Belfast who came under the command of Vice Admiral J. de Robeck, the recently-appointed C-in-C Atlantic Fleet, who was based at Invergordon in Scotland. It was also decided that the only remaining flag officer in Ireland, Rear Admiral Fox, would remain in Kingstown for the time being and continue to liaise with General Nevil Macready, GOC, British Forces in Ireland.[7]

The main reason for the Admiralty basing Somerville in Cobh rather than in Buncrana was because of an agreement between the two governments for the Royal Navy to remain in Haulbowline until the Irish Free State was in a position to take over the dockyard, so it was necessary for a senior officer to be based there.[8]

This meant that there were now three separate areas of naval responsibility in Irish waters under three SNOs, only one of whom was a flag officer, but who did not have any control over the other two. As the Admiralty explained it, the SNO, Belfast covered the 'Northern Government area'; the

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[4] Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, p. 60.
[5] Gaunt, memorandum to Admiralty 29 Apr. 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).
[6] Admiralty to C-in-C., Plymouth, 20 May 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).
[7] Admiralty to de Robeck, 25 Sept. 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).
[8] Admiralty to C-in-C., Devonport, 20 Apr. 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).

SNO Kingstown liaised with Macready in the 'Free State Area'; SNO Queenstown covered the 'Republican Area'.[9]

The command structure was further complicated by the fact that all three officers were to receive orders directly from the Admiralty. It would have been normal practice for Rear Admiral Fox to receive orders from the Admiralty, but the other two non-flag officers would normally have expected to receive their orders from their commanding officers and to report directly to them. The Admiralty's reasons were that they felt that the situation in Ireland was changing so frequently and was 'of a peculiar nature', so they had to be in constant communication with the Colonial Office and the War Office, making it necessary for them to deal directly with the SNOs.[10] The Admiralty also informed de Robeck that 'the Chief of the Imperial General Staff [the Earl of Cavan] had asked especially that the SNOs be given discretion to act at once, if necessary, without referring to the Admiralty.'[11]

This was a most unusual arrangement, and not one that either de Robeck or Browning welcomed. There was a further complication in the command structure in that General Macready, had responsibility for all military operations in Ireland, including naval operations that 'could be considered significant' and that Admiral Fox in Dublin would liaise with him and Admiral Browning in Plymouth while reporting directly to the Admiralty.[12]

One analysis of the Royal Navy's involvement in the Civil War sees Churchill's hand in these manoeuvrings: 'Churchill wanted a direct chain of command from the Admiralty to the two SNOs at Queenstown and Belfast' and suggests that this was a part of Churchill's 'ever tightening grip...on naval matters'.[13] Churchill was Colonial Secretary at the time and so he was deeply involved in the Irish situation but when he had been at the Admiralty he was forever trying to be directly involved in naval operations, much to the annoyance of senior officers, so the suggestion is plausible. However, the First Lord of the Admiralty, Leo Amery, who knew Ireland well, was too strong-minded to go along with this unless the arrangement suited him - which it did

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[9] Ibid.
[10] Admiralty to de Robeck 28 Aug. 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).
[11] Admiralty minute 25 Sept. 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).
[12] Admiralty telegram to. Gaunt, 20 Apr. 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253); 'Orders for destroyers in Irish waters', 28 Mar. 1923 (TNA, ADM 1/8652.253).
[13] Linge, 'The Royal Navy and the Irish Civil War', p. 63...

because being in direct communcation with the SNOs meant that information about the activities of the destroyers was less likely to be made public.

While the naval command structure was unusual, there were no administrative mishaps because of it, and the navy's activities ran smoothly, which was fortunate because, unlike the army, the Royal Navy was actively involved in operations throughout the Civil War. The orders which Somerville issued to ships' commanders in August were a continuation of earlier orders under which they operated throughout the war and they indicate just how extensive a role the navy played. Order (3) (below) is particularly interesting in the latitude it gave commanders in providing direct, active assistance to Irish Free State troops:

(1) To stop the 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, W/T, Searchlight, or bombardment.

(4) Protection of residents or private or public property from outrage.

(5) Transport of G.P.O. mails (all railways being out of action).[14]

Commanders were also advised to 'reply heavily with every available gun' whenever they were shot at.[15] A final duty of the navy was to provide the transport for military supplies from England to Dublin.[16]

These orders remained in force throughout the war until the command in Haulbowline was transferred in March 1923.

The first of these orders was the most important because gunrunning was believed to be a serious problem. Concern over gunrunning became acute in March 1922 when the SS *Upnor* which was transporting a large quantity of arms and ammunition from Haulbowline to Plymouth, was captured by the IRA and relieved of its cargo at Ballycotton, Cork. This incident was a serious embarrassment for the Royal Navy, and in response to it, the navy increased

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[14] Cdr. H.V. Holt, *Fortnightly report on proceedings*, 31 Aug. 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8632/173)
[15] Ibid.
[16] HMS *Vancouver*, HMS *Whirlwind*, HMS *Danae*, and HMS *Vortigern* all delivered many tons of ammunition and other military supplies to Kingstown from Pembroke in July 1922. (TNA, ADM 1/8632/173).

the intensity its patrols[17] However, most of the intelligence on gunrunning proved to be groundless and to be no more than rumour.

Prevention meant stopping and searching any vessels that were considered to be suspicious, even in Irish territorial waters. The Provisional Government welcomed this help as much as it welcomed the increasing cooperation of the British government on intelligence, especially intelligence related to gunrunning.[18] The arrangement was formalised on 6 September 1922 when the National Army was ordered to cooperate with the authorities in places outside Ireland for the arrest of persons engaged in gunrunning or other activities, on behalf of the 'Irregulars'.'[19] This did no more than regularise the cooperation that had existed between the navy and the National Army for months.

The Admiralty blamed customs officials in Britain and Ireland for most reported incidents of arms smuggling, even going so far as to suggest that customs officials at Ayr were assisting the IRA.[20] Their fears continued, and in early July Somerville was informed that gunrunning in the south and south-west of Ireland was expected to increase, and to combat this, six extra minesweepers and four trawlers were being ordered to Cobh for him to institute 'a vigilant patrol' in conjunction with his destroyers.[21] Nonetheless, the Admiralty was obliged to row back on its commitment three weeks later when it decided that gunrunning patrols would have to be curtailed because they could no longer spare the number of ships that were operating in Ireland. It was decided that as no arms-carrying vessels had been discovered for almost two months the five minesweepers and four trawlers would be withdrawn, leaving 2 light cruisers and 8 destroyers.[22] (40 barrels of small arms ammunition had been seized by HMS *Velox* on a small coasting vessel at Fenit, Co. Kerry).[23]

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[17] Gaunt to Admiralty, 31 Mar 1922 (TNA, ADM 178/100).
[18] McMahon, *British Spies and Irish rebels,* p. 95.
[19] Provisional Government minutes, 6 Sept. 1922 (NAI, G 1/3), quoted in McMahon, *British spies and Irish rebels*, p. 95.
[20] Admiralty minute, 30 Sept. 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).
[21] L.Curtis to Cope, telegram 3 July, 1922 (TNA, CO 906/21).
[22] Admiralty to Colonial Office, 25 July 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).
[23] HMS *Danae* fortnightly report, 14 June 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8632/173).

This decision must have been rescinded soon afterwards because after it was discovered on 17 August 1922 that a shipment of arms and ammunition was smuggled into Ballysaggart, Donegal, in the coasting vessel S.S. *Carrickfergus* because by 16 September the complement of vessels in Irish waters had increased to 3 light cruisers; 9 destroyers, 6 minesweepers; and 4 trawlers.[24] This was a sizeable force and it was a considerable increase over the number of five months earlier, but it was more than the Admiralty could sustain so the minesweepers and trawlers were withdrawn the following month.[25] A few days later they then decided that 2 cruisers and 2 destroyers would also be withdrawn.[26] It is then recorded that 4 destroyers and 1 cruiser were allocated to Cobh; 1 cruiser and 1 motor torpedo boat to Kingstown; and 2 destroyers to Belfast.[27] These figures do not tally, so perhaps one destroyer instead of a cruiser was allocated to Kingstown.

The Admiralty was forced into these measures because its resources elsewhere were being stretched to the limit. There was a demand to allocate more ships to the Mediterranean to satisfy needs there, and the Admiralty were also being pressed to send more ships to the Baltic to support British fishing trawlers that were encountering problems in Russian waters.[28] This was happening at a time when the British government was implementing some of the Geddes Committee's recommendations for drastic cuts in army and navy expenditure.

In addition, there was a legal problem with regard to the navy's gunrunning activities. With the creation of the new state, the Royal Navy no longer had any powers to search vessels in Irish territorial waters. Prior to the First World War, the navy's authority to search ships derived from the Customs Act, and then only if the Commissioners of Customs had authorised the search, but this act was revoked in August 1914. The only remaining instrument under which suspected ships could be searched was the Firearms

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[24] Admiralty minute, n.d., but c. 26 Sept. 1922; Colonial Office memo, 16 Sept. 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).
[25] Admiralty minute, 4 Oct. 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).
[26] Admiralty to C-in-C, Atlantic Fleet, 11 Oct. 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).
[27] Admiralty to Colonial Office, 16 Sept. 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).
[28] Ibid.

Act, but the Crown Law Officers had already advised the Admiralty that the navy had no powers under this act either. '[29]

Within territorial waters, it was the responsibility of the relevant customs authority to prevent the export and importation of arms, and only they could intercede in their territorial waters.[30] During the War of Independence, the navy's power to search vessels had derived from the ROI (Restoration of Order in Ireland) Act, but this act lapsed once the Anglo-Irish Treaty came into force and the navy's power lapsed with it.[31]

As a means of overcoming these difficulties the Admiralty suggested to the Colonial Office that the Provisional Government be approached with a view to giving it extended powers authorising the navy to carry out searches in Irish waters, even though they were doubtful that the Provisional Government had introduced legislation allowing it to do so.[32] Lord Devonshire wrote to Tim Healy, the Governor-General, in February 1923 rehearsing the background to the navy's authority in the matter, and reiterating that it had no formal power to continue stopping ships. Nonetheless, he asked Healy to see if the Provisional Government could be persuaded to allow the navy to search suspected vessels anywhere in Irish waters.[33]

No formal action ensued, mainly because it would also have been extremely difficult, politically, for the Provisional Government to be seen to permit the Royal Navy to have free rein in the newly-gained territorial waters, and to publicly demonstrate that it needed the navy service to quash the 'Irregulars'. The British government was also concerned that it could be sued for damages by ships' owners if the navy was found to be acting illegally. To avoid any diplomatic incidents, the Admiralty informed the C-in-C, Devonport, of the legal limits of his authority in Irish waters and that these must not be exceeded in the absence of an indemnity by the Irish Free State government against action for damages that might be taken against the Admiralty.[34] Accordingly, Admiral Browning issued orders to vessels on the Irish coast that the only naval action to be taken against vessels suspected of gunrunning was

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[29] Admiralty to Colonial Office, 22 Jan.1922 (TNA CO 739/19).
[30] Admiralty to Commissioners of Customs, 7 Sept. 1922 (TNA ADM 1/8652/253).
[31] Admiralty to Colonial Office, 22 Jan .1922 (TNA CO 739/19).
[32] Ibid.
[33] Devonshire to Healy, 12 Feb. 1923 (TNA, CO 739/19; NAI, GOVG1/F54).
[34] 'Answers to questions raised by C-in-C, Plymouth', but likely date Feb. 1922 (TNA, ADM 739/19).

to shadow the vessel and to inform the relevant Irish authorities as soon as possible.[35] However, by this time the end of Civil War was in sight so the decision had little effect.

While there were difficulties surrounding the prevention of gunrunning, there were none with another important navy activity - intelligence gathering. This was a valuable function of the destroyers during the war as the intelligence gathered was of benefit to both governments. Indeed, one historian has described destroyers as 'the best source of information on the civil war outside Dublin: they [the officers] were practically the only remaining British officials outside the capital,'[36] especially as they were concentrated in the areas in southwest and west Ireland where republican resistance was strongest. The amount of detail in Captain Somerville's intelligence reports about troop deployments, strengths of National Army and 'Irregular' units, and accounts of the course of conflicts between them, are evidence of close cooperation between navy and army commanders.[37] However, unfounded British governmental belief in the capability of the republicans succeeded in increasing apprehension about republican attacks on the defended forts. There had always been a concern that the forts were vulnerable to a concerted land-based attack so part of the forts' defence plans called for the navy to provide the necessary backup. These fears were unfounded because the republicans did not have the firepower to breach the forts' defences and, even more importantly, their problems in dealing with the National Army were much more pressing.

The republicans did, however, attack coastguard stations and war signal stations, destroying them whenever they could. They were always easy targets because they offered little defence against such attacks and another of the navy's routine duties during the Civil War, and the War of Independence, was servicing the coastguard stations and lighthouses around the coast. One officer described this as his main job in 1920. He had to ensure that the stations and lighthouses were kept adequately supplied because the local population did not dare to keep contact with them or supply them with

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[35] 'Orders for destroyers on the Irish coast', 28 Mar. 1923 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).
[36] McMahon, *British spies and Irish rebels*, p. 85.
[37] Intelligence reports July 1922 –Feb. 1923 (TNA, ADM 178/159; CO 739/3), *passim*.

provisions out of fear of republican reprisals.[38] Vessels were also frequently used in the evacuation of these buildings in areas that were republican strongholds, usually along the south and west coasts, and for taking on board loyalist civilian personnel who had difficulty in escaping safely by road. Throughout 1922 the destroyers were used routinely in the evacuation of coastguard stations and occasionally in the relief of stations that had been taken by the IRA.

For example, in a three-day period in May, HMS *Warwick* evacuated the stations at Cleggan Bay, Rosmoney, Blacksod Bay, Rosse's Point, and Killybegs and took personnel to Buncrana. The ship's commander reported that he experienced no difficulties with the local population whose attitude to his officers and men he described as being 'all that could be desired'.[39] HMS *Watchman* took on seventeen coastguard officers from Valentia on 23 May and proceeded to Carnsore station to evacuate it of more officers and equipment. This was done in more tense circumstances, in the presence of twenty-four IRA men, all in uniform, who allowed the evacuation to proceed without hindrance. They did not realise that the station's supply of arms and ammunition was also taken from the station along with other equipment as they looked on.[40]

The difficulties that the navy experienced in relieving these stations varied throughout the country. One instance could even be described as akin to farce.

The coastguard station at Clifden, which doubled as the office of the divisional Royal Navy officer, was captured by the IRA in May 1922, and the coastguard officer was held prisoner along with Lt-Cdr H.B. Worsley.[41] The capture of the station has the appearance of being without particular purpose because the gunmen did not seem to have any plan for the station once they had captured it, nor did they seem to know what to do with their prisoners. Worsley argued with the IRA leader, a man named Connolly, who he described

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[38] Vice Admiral Baillie H.T. Grohman, in Sheehan, *British voices*, pp 76-7.
[39] Commander, HMS *Warwick* to C-in-C Western Approaches, 9 May 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8632/173).
[40] Lt. E.L. Hill & Lt-Cdr. K.B. Miller to SNO Haulbowline 27 May 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8632/173).
[41] Lt-Cdr. H.B. Worsley report to C-in-C, Western Approaches, 5 May 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8632/173); (TNA, CO 739/11).

as an 'illiterate individual and obviously a very low type',[42] but he never succeeded in ascertaining exactly what Connolly wanted. He did get agreement that both he and the coastguard officer could leave the station and spend the night in the local hotel. There appears to have been no sense of urgency in informing the authorities about the incident, or asking for assistance because it was not until Worsley had had a leisurely supper in the hotel that he called in to the local Marconi W/T station and 'handed in three messages addressed to the Admiralty, the C-in-C Western Approaches, and the coastguard captain at Queenstown...asking that a ship be sent at once'.[43] This resulted in HMS *Venetia* being despatched immediately. Worsley then described returning to the station the following morning, and while he was gathering together his personal belongings *Venetia's* commander, Lt-Cdr J.Troup, arrived.

Troup, in his report, describes an uneventful arrival at 11.15 am, and then proceeding on foot towards Clifden, unarmed, but with the aid of a walking stick, and in the company of his first lieutenant,.[44] After enquiring of the whereabouts of the coastguard station from some locals on the way, he arrived at the station where he entered unannounced and demanded to see the IRA leader. His entrance caused panic, with the gunmen grabbing their weapons and pointing them at the two officers. Nonetheless, Troup carried on regardless and insisted that he was there to take off all of the prisoners and their effects. This was eventually agreed, and the station was evacuated, even to the extent of the republicans providing a car to transport all the personal belongings to the ship. During this period, Worsley and one of the coastguard officers managed to burn all confidential files and code books that were in the station in a fire in one of the offices. Troup was subsequently commended for his courage but was reprimanded for leaving his ship under the command of a junior officer while he and his first lieutenant departed on a potentially dangerous venture.[45]

While most naval activities had a purely military purpose, the navy was also involved in activities of a humanitarian nature—rescuing civilians,

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[42] Ibid.
[43] Lt-Cdr. H.B. Worsley report to C-in-C Western Approaches, 5 May 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8632/173).
[44] Lt-Cdr. J. Troup to Adm. Gaunt, 5 May 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8632/173).
[45] Gaunt to Admiralty, 5 May 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8632/173).

usually Protestant loyalists, from situations in which their safety was threatened or their lives were at risk.[46] In one case, a Col. Heard, his family and house staff were rescued after their house near Sneem had been raided three times in the previous week.[47]

The most serious incident took place on 29 June 1922 when a party of fifteen republicans took over an orphanage in Clifden, locked up the boys in an adjoining school building, set fire to the orphanage, and looted the premises when the fire subsided. They then went to the adjacent girls' orphanage and questioned the matron, at gunpoint, about whether she was harbouring some man who had been heard to give 'some military command' to boy scouts who had marched through the town. The boys in the orphanage were members of the local scout troop that the republicans claimed was a training school for boys to serve in the British army and because the boys were believed to have been guilty of 'espionage'.[48] The destroyers *Watchman* and *Danae* were sent to help, with instructions to evacuate the buildings if it was felt that lives might be in danger. When Lt-Cdr. K. Millar, *Watchman's* commander, arrived he decided that all of the boys should be taken on board because the republicans had openly announced that they intended to shoot one of the senior boys, who they said had been spying. and also because the orphanage matron had been given a written note by the republican leader that repudiated guarantees of safety that he gave her the previous day. The note also ordered that all the inmates should leave immediately.[49] Millar also observed that his ship was under constant surveillance while it was there, but was not attacked. The thirty two boys, along with Purkiss and his daughter (the matron) were taken on board and transported to Cobh and then to London via Plymouth. Two days later, two destroyers returned and took onboard the twenty two girls and remaining adults out of fear for their safety after republicans had returned to the girls' orphanage.[50]

The incident was well covered by the Irish newspapers but not by the national press in England, so the British government appears to have missed

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[46] Somerville to Admiralty, 16 Nov. 1922 (TNA, CO 739/3).
[47] Ibid.
[48] Report on burning of orphanage, 4 July 1922 (TNA, CO 739/3).
[49] Millar to Somerville, 5 July 1922 (TNA, CO 739/3).
[50] HMS *Danae*, telegram to Admiralty, 6 July 1922 (TNA, CO 739/6).

an opportunity to put out some strong propaganda.[51] It was reported in Britain only because of a question in Westminster in which Sir William Davison asked Churchill, as Colonial Secretary, for information on the episode.[52] At the time of Churchill's reply, there had been no decision to take the girls on board, so he was unaware that they were due to arrive.

This incident had the potential to become a disaster but the availability of the destroyers, and their swift action, ensured the safety of the children and spared the new state the undesired adverse world-wide publicity that would have ensued had they been harmed.

Most of the activities that have been described are activities that would have been expected of the navy but the most noteworthy order under which commanders operated is the one which directed them to 'Assist Free State troops in any way they will accept help, W/T, Searchlight, or bombardment', and this order was obeyed. Throughout the war, the navy gave active support to the National Army, mainly along the south and west coasts, and instances of the type of support are well documented. This assistance was concentrated around the south-west of the country in the latter half of 1922.

HMS *Badminton*, a twin screw minesweeper, was involved in probably the most significant incident when it came under heavy fire off Lackeen coastguard station in the Kenmare River in July. *Badminton* replied with a 'bombardment' from its twelve-pounder and its four-inch artillery that demolished the building.[53] An officer who fired one of the guns has left an account of his involvement in the episode.

Lt. B. De L'Faunce, describes sitting in the wardroom of his ship and hearing a noise like 'hailstones on a corrugated iron roof', which he identified as machine gun fire from a Lewis gun from ashore that was just about out of effective range.[54] He then ran to a forward gun position, trained the gun on the coastguard station and put a shell through its front door.

The incident started earlier in the day when *Badminton* was attempting to deliver mail to a member of a new Irish Free State senate who lived on the

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[51] *Irish Times*, 5 July; *Irish Independent*, 4 July; *Connaught Tribune*, 8 July; *The Times*, 5 July 1922.
[52] Davison, *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, 4 July 1922, clvi, cc175-74.
[53] Somerville, telegram to Admiralty, 30 July 1922 (TNA, (CO 739/3); Intelligence report, 31 July 1922 (TNA, ADM 178/159).
[54] Lt. B. De L'Faunce, in Sheehan, (ed.), *British voices*, pp 55-6.

shore of the Kenmare River. While *Badminton* anchored offshore, a dinghy with one officer and one seaman were sent ashore with the mail, only to be fired on by 'Irregulars'. The two men managed to turn around the dinghy safely and to return while *Badminton* gave covering fire with a Lewis gun. It was while the captain and his officers were discussing what to do that De L'Faunce was startled by the sound of 'hailstones'.[55]

Similar incidents occurred during subsequent months. HMS *Doon* was fired on at Youghal and retaliated until the firing stopped when National Army troops took over.[56] HMS *Truro* was fired on in Killary Harbour and replied using twelve-pounder guns, Lewis guns, and rifles.[57] HMS *Vanity* provided .303 ammunition to Irish Free State troops in Bantry at the request of 'the army commandant' [Griffin] and assisted them by directing their searchlights towards the republicans' defensive positions.[58] HMS *Waterhen* supplied .45 ammunition to General Emmet Dalton and offered to obtain petrol that he also needed.[59] Two days later, *Waterhen* returned fire with 4-inch artillery at Dingle when attacked, and fired a star shell the following week at Cahirciveen at the request of Comdt. Griffin.[60] HMS *Seawolf* assisted National Army troops by turning its searchlights on republican positions in Cahirciveen and repeated the exercise three days later in a second attack on the town, and provided further assistance by supplying the troops with two Lewis guns and 2000 rounds of ammunition.[61] HMS *Etterick* fired a blank shot during an attack on Fenit, causing the republicans to call off the attack.[62] HMS *Vivacious* fired star shells and supplied two more Lewis guns to the local garrison at the request of commandant, and lit her searchlights every night for several subsequent days.[63] HMS *Wryneck* also assisted at Cahirciveen by lighting its searchlights and by firing star shells.[64] HMS *Vansittart* was subjected to small arms fire

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[55] Ibid., p. 55.
[56] Somerville, Intelligence report, 16 Aug. 1922 (TNA, ADM 178/159; CO 739/3).
[57] Somerville, Intelligence report, 28 Aug. 1922 (TNA, ADM 178/159; CO 739/3).
[58] Somerville, Intelligence report, 1 Sept. 1922 (TNA, CO 739/3).
[59] Somerville, Intelligence report, 12 Sept. 1922 (TNA, CO 739/3).
[60] Somerville, Intelligence report, 19 Sept. 1922 (TNA, CO 739/3; ADM 178/159).
[61] Somerville, Intelligence report, 28 Sept., 1922 (TNA, CO 739/3; ADM 178/159); Somerville telegram to Admiralty, 25 Sept. 1922 (TNA, CO 739/3).
[62] Somerville, Intelligence report, 28 Sept. 1922 (TNA, CO 739/3; ADM 178/159).
[63] Somerville, Intelligence report, 7 Oct. 1922 (TNA, CO 739/3).
[64] Ibid.

from shore near Kenmare but did not reply because the source of the firing could not be identified.[65]

On 8 December as 1000 National Army troops began encircling the republican position at Kealkill, west Cork, Somerville was requested by the GOC National Forces Cork to send a destroyer to Bantry and to transport 100 troops to Ardnagashel (about nine kilometres from Kealkill) on the northern shore of Whiddy Harbour.[66] HMS *Volunteer* was despatched immediately and did as requested, using the ship's small boats to land the men ashore. A second destroyer, HMS *Worcester,* was sent to relieve *Volunteer,* but later that evening Somerville received two requests for a destroyer to be sent to Valentia. He ordered *Worcester* to Valentia to assist 'as it now seemed likely that the garrison at Cahirciveen would need support, since the operation at Bantry is part of a larger scheme designed to capture Kenmare, and it is possible that all garrisons have had to contribute troops to assist'.[67] HMS *Seawolf* was despatched to Bantry to take over from *Worcester.*

These incidents show just how active the Royal Navy was in assisting the National Army and it is possible that they do not reflect the full extent of the support because there are gaps in the frequency of the available intelligence reports. At a time of such intense activity in the south-west it is unlikely that Somerville would not have sent reports for periods of several weeks.

This active cooperation with local National Army commanders was widespread throughout the south-west and another area in which it was invaluable, not just for local commanders, was in communications. Wireless telegraph stations were frequent targets for republicans because of the disruption that was caused when they were put out of action, especially to the communications between National Army detachments. The Royal Navy helped to overcome these problems by allowing troops to send messages frequently from radios on their ships and by allowing the ships to act as replacement stations.[68]

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[65] Somerville, Intelligence report, 16 Oct. 1922 (TNA, CO 739/3).
[66] Somerville, Intelligence report, 9 Dec. 1922 (TNA, CO 739/3).
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.

One of the most important stations, Valentia, which had been taken by republicans, but was subsequently recovered by a contingent of the National Army, was a vital communication link with the outside world. In September, the station did not know what other W/T stations were working so it was instructed to pass all urgent messages to any British warship for onward transmission. One destroyer, HMS *Valentia* communicated with Dublin via New York to Waterville to Liverpool.[69] In another instance, a sloop was detailed to act as a W/T guardship for the National Army in Skibbereen following a request from a local officer.[70]

The navy was not, of course, being wholly magnanimous in these actions. Their support gave them another gateway to the internal communications of the National Army, whose messages were already being intercepted without difficulty by the navy.[71] Such access to private communications within the National Nrmy was a valuable source of intelligence to the British authorities.

Both Browning and de Robeck were unhappy about the command structure, especially about the SNOs taking orders directly from the Admiralty but they accepted it. However, after two months, and with the navy's activities increasing, they both complained about the structure. Browning visited Whitehall and told the Admiralty that he did not want to have any responsibility for Irish matters.[72] De Robeck was even more forthright: 'it is not possible for me to take any responsibility for the issue of instructions to any such ships or for their failure to carry out successfully any duty assigned to them.'[73] His argument was that any naval or military officer giving assistance to a civil power is generally in a difficult position, and that for the SNOs in Irish waters it was particularly difficult because they were working under the command of a flag officer who was not 'acquainted with the local conditions to whom they can look for guidance'.[74] In short, de Robeck and Browning argued that too much responsibility was being placed on the

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[69] Somerville, Intelligence report, 19 Sept. 1922 (TNA, CO 739/3).
[70] Somerville, Intelligence report, 1 Sept. 1922 (TNA, CO 739/3).
[71] Ibid.
[72] Admiralty to de Robeck, 29 Aug. 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253). (The Admiralty informed de Robeck that Browning had spoken to Beatty about the matter).
[73] Ibid.
[74] de Robeck to Admiralty, 20 Sept. 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).

shoulders of SNOs who were not flag officers, and who could be placed in an awkward diplomatic situation. De Robeck's advice to the Admiralty was that a flag officer with responsibility for the whole island should be appointed.[75] Their protests and advice were overridden and the new command structure remained in place, with Somerville continuing to report to Browning in Plymouth.

Macready was even unhappier about the situation, but his complaints were also ignored. Moreover, he felt that his authority in these situations was neither fully appreciated nor understood and this was a further cause of annoyance to him. He expressed this annoyance in a personal letter to Sir James Masterson-Smith who was Permanent under-Secretary for the Colonies at the time but who had been private secretary to five consecutive First Lords of the Admiralty, and whom Macready knew in another capacity as Assistant Secretary in the War Office. In his letter, Macready complained about not being consulted on naval matters. He was particularly annoyed to learn that N.D. Loughnane, a senior official in the War Office, had been asked by the Colonial Office to go to see W.T. Cosgrave about a naval incident in Kenmare but that he (Macready) had not been informed about the request. He also complained that both Loughnane and Cosgrave were unaware that he had anything to do with naval matters in Ireland.[76] In describing his position to Masterson-Smith, Macready made it clear that he was not happy with the relationship between himself and the navy and his description of the relationship reveals the sensitivities that surrounded it: 'the navy has for a long time been working, I will not say under me, for that might hurt the susceptibilities of the Senior Service, but have been working in very close conjunction under my advice.'[77]

The incident that he referred to was when he had been contacted by Capt. Somerville seeking permission to allow Kenmare, which was in the hands of the 'Irregulars' at the time and where a naval rating had been wounded, to be bombarded by a destroyer. Somerville also told him that the

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[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Macready, 'personal and private' letter to Masterson-Smith, Colonial Office, 15 Nov. 1922 (TNA, CO 739/3).

request to bombard the town had been received from 'a Free State officer'.[78] Macready told him not to bombard the town, but he also sent instructions to Admiral Fox at Kingstown to the effect that destroyers must only return fire if they were attacked and ordering him to send the instructions to 'the various Senior Naval Officers'.[79] He was clearly unaware that Fox had no authority over Somerville or the SNO in Belfast.

This type of confusion, of course, was one consequence of Somerville having to report directly to the Admiralty. Nevertheless, this line of command lasted until 31 March 1923 when Admiral Browning finally took over the Irish command and the shore-based post of SNO that had been held by Somerville was terminated.[80] Just three destroyers were now allocated to Cobh and Berehaven, one in each port and the third, based in either Cobh or Devonport, which acted as a reserve to cover for leave and maintenance.

One of Browning's first actions was to issue a new set of orders that limited the scope that had been given to commanders and they were more specific in that they detailed the circumstances under which they were to give assistance to British troops and Irish Free State forces, and about how about how they were to deal with republican forces. [81]

For instance, they could embark Irish Free State troops for transport and supply them with ammunition and stores provided this was approved in advance by the C-in-C in Plymouth. The destroyers were permitted to support Irish Free State troops if help was asked for, but they were not to land men for operations ashore. If ships came under fire from shore they were empowered to retaliate at once if they could see the source of fire, but if they were unable to retaliate immediately, they were not to retaliate at all. If a commander encountered a ship that he suspected of gunrunning, he was ordered to do nothing more than shadow the ship and inform the Irish Free State authorities.[82]

Two of the specific orders were that 'commanders were to keep in touch with the commandants of Irish Free State forces at ports they visited' and

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[78] Loughnane, telegram to Cabinet Committee for Irish Affairs, 15 Nov. 1922 (TNA, CO 739/3).
[79] Ibid
[80] Admiralty to Browning 17 Feb. 1923 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).
[81] Browning, 'Orders for destroyers in Irish waters', 28 Mar. 1923 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).
[82] Ibid.

'commanders were to communicate 'any information which may be of military value...to the Officer Commanding British Forces at Queenstown or Berehaven *and to the nearest commandant of Irish Free State forces*'. (italics added).[83]

However, by this time the Civil War was effectively over, and the Royal Navy's involvement in it came to an end and no other incidents are reported of actions by the navy in support of Irish Free State forces.

The Royal Navy's role in the Civil War was more extensive than is generally realised, and this raises the question of who, on the Irish side, knew about it. Local National Army commanders obviously knew about it, the 'Irregulars' knew about it, and the local population knew about it. This being so, the Provisional Government must have known about it but there is no evidence of it either condoning or sanctioning it officially.

While the navy's involvement could not be described as determining the outcome of the war, there is little doubt that it was of considerable benefit to the Provisional Government and the National Army. The fact that Somerville reported directly to the Admiralty meant that news of most of the navy's activities were kept from Whitehall military and political committees and so the actions received little publicity. It was a strategy that worked both for London and Dublin but it was fraught with danger, and if the anti-Treaty forces had gained the upper hand, the consequences could have been disastrous for both governments.

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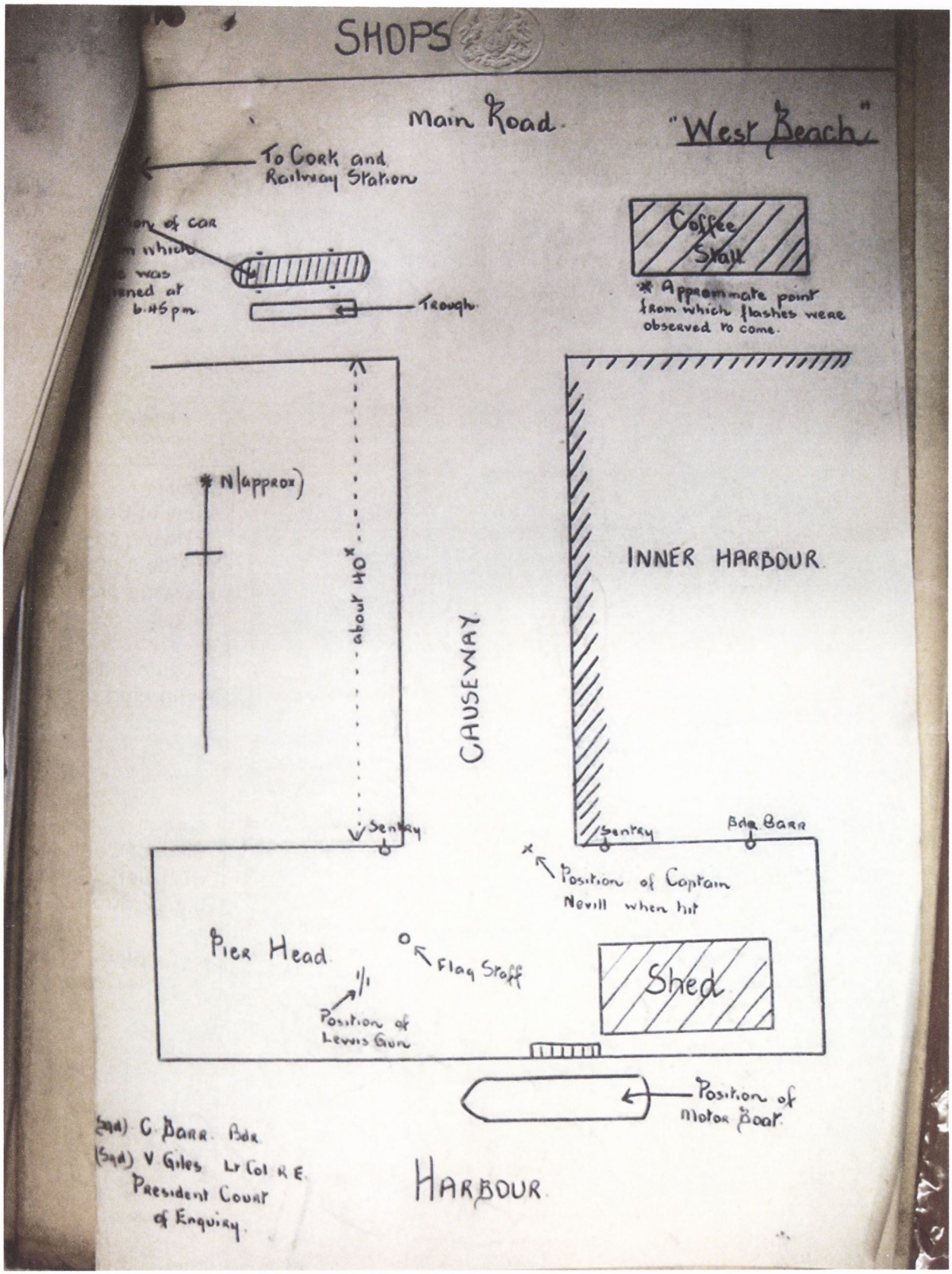
[83] Ibid.



Map used at the military Court of Enquiry by the British Army into an attack on British military personnel arriving by boat from Spike Island at Cobh landing jetty in 1924. *(Image: War Office file WO 32/4851)*

Above:
View of Cobh jetty showing coffee stall beside footpath. (see drawing previous page).

(Photo Lawrence Collection by kind permission NLI)

Left:
View of Cobh jetty with Spike Island in background.

(Photo: by kind permission Getty Images)

Left:
View of Cobh jetty and slipway looking towards town.

(Photo: by kind permission Getty Images)

Top: West Beach, Queenstown.
Middle: Queenstown promenade. The Queen's Hotel (later the States Hotel) which was a popular venue for dances by British naval and military personnel, is the building in the middle photo with the flagpole on the roof.
Bottom: Queen's Hotel leading to promenade and West Beach. All photos c. 1900.

(Photos: Lawrence Collection by kind permission of NLI)

Imperial Conference in London, 1926
Seated: Stanley Baldwin, King George V, Mackenzie King (Canada)
Standing: Walter Monroe (Newfoundland), Gordon Coates (New Zealand), Stanley Bruce (Australia)
Barry Hertzog (South Africa), William Cosgrave (Irish Free State)
(Photo: Wikipedia Commons)

Eamon de Valera being greeted bu Malcolm MacDonald at Euston station, London, on 24th April 1938 to sign the pact with Britain under which Britain would return the Treaty Ports to Ireland. On the right is John Dulanty, the Irish High Commissioner in London.

(photo: by kind permission Getty Images)

5. Attack on British military at Cobh

The aftermath of the Civil War left a bitterness between the opposing sides that remained for decades. One consequence of this was that the anti-treaty, republican resentment at failing to achieve full independence was directed at the incumbent Irish government and not at the British military that remained on Irish soil. So, with one notable exception, anti-Treaty protesters continued to direct their resentment towards arms of the new state, and ignored British soldiers attached to the forts.

The one exception was an attack on a War Office launch ferrying soldiers and civilians from Spike Island to Cobh in 1924 and the attack was made as the passengers were disembarking at the quayside. It is the only recorded serious attack on British military personnel stationed in the Treaty Ports during the sixteen years of their existence, and there are indications that the attack was made not against the actual presence of the soldiers but was intended to cause major embarrassment to the Irish government. It failed to do this, even though the incident received widespread news coverage in Britain and the USA, because of how the government handled it.

The attack was totally unexpected because relations between the British garrison and both Cork and Cobh continued to be amicable. The War Office launch was a familiar sight in Cobh and it operated a regular timetable throughout the day from Spike Island. It had not encountered any trouble, and even during the War of Independence it had never been found necessary to have an armed escort on board.[1] The launch also made occasional trips to Cork city and while it did carry an armed escort during the War of Independence, this practice was discontinued in July 1923 because it was no longer deemed to be necessary.[2]

However, at about 7.00pm on Friday 21 March 1924, the attack was made on British soldiers and civilians as they were disembarking from the launch *Wyndham* at the pier in Cobh. Having travelled the fifteen-minute journey from Spike Island, they were subjected to heavy bursts of fire from two Lewis machine guns by four men in a large open touring car, and wearing

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[1] Haywood to HQ Western Command, 29 Mar. 1924 (TNA, WO 32/4851).
[2] Ibid.

the uniforms of officers of the National Army. After firing a number of bursts the car took off and some moments later opened fire on the destroyer HMS *Scythe* that was lying close by in the harbour, but without doing any damage. The launch returned to Spike Island as quickly as possible with all the casualties on board. One soldier died later and twenty-three soldiers and civilians were wounded, some seriously, in the attack.

Approximately one hour later, Capt. P. Neville, Royal Garrison Artillery, who was on Spike Island, was ordered to Cobh with an armed escort of two soldiers with rifles and two with a Lewis gun with orders to collect any soldiers who were still on shore, and also to bring back a local doctor, Dr H.S. Tarrant, whose services were needed at the hospital on Spike Island to assist the army medical staff. After collecting Dr Tarrant, and while waiting on the pier for one more soldier, Neville was hit by a short burst of machine gun fire and wounded in the right buttock.

Lt-Col A.H.W. Haywood, the Commanding Officer, South Irish Coast Defences [S.I.C.D.] based on Spike Island, made the point in his report that, being a Friday night, the troops had just been paid so the launch had a larger number of troops on board than on normal trips. He concluded that the attackers must have been aware that this was a regular occurrence and planned their attack accordingly.[3] The *Wyndham* was a War Department launch that had a capacity of 200 passengers and was used for ferrying troops and stores in the harbour.[4] It was well known locally that large numbers of soldiers came ashore on a Friday evening at this time, usually in good spirits and looking forward to a good time on the town.[5] From evidence given at a subsequent court of inquiry, it is also clear that there was a regular timetable for launches to ferry passengers to and from Spike Island (the scheduled departure time for the *Wyndham* from Spike Island on the fateful day was 6.35 pm) and these time were widely known in the area. It was also widely known that British soldiers were prohibited from carrying arms while ashore.

A court of inquiry, comprising Lt-Col V. Giles, Major G.F. Tuke, and Major J.W. Hare, was held on 24 March on Spike Island at which the

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[3] Haywood to HQ Western Command, 22 Mar. 1924, (TNA, WO 32/4850).
[4] Queenstown defence details 1921 (TNA, WO 192/34).
[5] *Sunday Independent*, 23 Mar. 1924.

testimony of eight witnesses was heard.[6] L/Cpl T. Walsh, a military policeman, who was unarmed and on duty on West Beach [road] in Cobh, described 'a large grey touring car with four occupants wearing Free State uniforms and Sambrowne [sic] belts' approaching from the railway station that 'took a position on the left hand side of the road just clear of the road running down the pier'. He described hearing machine-gun fire that lasted about a minute coming from the direction of the car.[7] (see map and images next page).

Another policeman, L/Cpl E.W. Westcott, was on duty forty yards to the east of the pier. He saw ' a large yellowish brown touring car standing on the road near the end of the pier; there were four men in it dressed in Free State uniform'. He also described the firing lasting about a minute but could not state the direction it came from.[8] As both men were unarmed, it is not unreasonable to suppose that both took cover to protect themselves and so might not have had a full view of events.

The third witness, Signalman E.H. Kirby of the Royal Corps of Signals, was more specific. He noticed 'a large dirty grey car standing near the end of the pier on the left hand side with about four men in Free State uniform in it'. He then records 'when I was about ten yards from the car I saw the men in it stand up and then bend down and produce two machine guns resembling Lewis guns with which they immediately opened fire on the people who had disembarked...'[9].

Another military policeman, L/Cpl S. Brockelbank, gave evidence of disembarking from the launch; walking along the pier; hearing machine-gun fire; and seeing men fall in front of him. He also said that he 'looked up and saw two spurts of flame as from machine guns coming from a light coloured greyish yellow car...there were three men in the car wearing Free State uniform'.[10]

Major H.C.Hildreth R.A.M.C. produced a detailed list of the casualties. This included the names of the nineteen soldiers and five civilians. One of the soldiers, Private H. Aspinall, 19, of the Royal Army Service Corps, had died

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[6] Court of Inquiry Proceedings, 24 Mar 1924 (TNA, WO 32/4851).
[7] Ibid. p. 2.
[8] Ibid. pp 2-3.
[9] Ibid. p.3.
[10] Ibid. p. 4.

from wounds to his chest and back; eight casualties were classified as 'dangerously ill'; eight as 'seriously wounded'; and six as 'slightly wounded'. The injury to Capt. Neville was not classified.[11] The civilian casualties were the skipper of the launch, F. Bell; the engineer, E.T. Hooper; two sisters, Pauline and May Lloyd, 17 years and 23 years old respectively, the daughters of a civilian clerk living and working on Spike Island; and a boy, Maurice Hurley, who lived in Cobh and who had been delivering meat to the launch for a local butcher by whom he was employed.[12] He was the only Irish casualty.

The sixth witness to give evidence, Bombardier C.V. Barr, simply stated that while walking from the launch he 'saw the firing started from a motor car which was standing at the end of the pier' and that he estimated the distance between the car and the *Wyndham* as being about fifty yards. The rest of his evidence related to being ordered to detail two men with a Lewis gun and two with rifles to return to Cobh with Capt. Neville. He described positioning the Lewis gun on the pier and remaining with it while Neville proceeded along the pier with the two riflemen. On their return a few minutes later, he posted the two riflemen as sentries on the pier. Then he said that 'about a dozen shots were fired; it sounded like slow speed Lewis gunfire' and he heard Capt. Neville shouting that he had been hit. He also heard his own Lewis gunner open fire. Bombardier Barr also added that on his return in the launch he checked the men's ammunition and found that only three rounds had been fired, and none from the rifles. The riflemen were not called as witnesses. This evidence is important, as will become evident later. The evidence of the two final witnesses is also significant because it was the only evidence that the British government would release to the Irish government some weeks later.[13]

Witness seven was Gunner F. Patterson, the Lewis gunner who opened fire. His evidence was that after being on the pier for about five minutes 'fire was opened on us from the direction of the shore and pier...I immediately opened fire with my Lewis gun but after a few rounds it jammed'.[14] He did not say what he fired at or if he saw anything.

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[11] Ibid. p. 4.
[12] Haywood to War Office, 5 Apr 1924 (TNA, WO 32/ 4850); Haywood to War Office, 22 Mar 1924 (TNA, WO 32/ 4850).
[13] Court of Enquiry proceedings, 24 Mar 1924 (TNA, WO 32/4851), pp 5-6.
[14] Ibid. p. 6.

The last witness was Capt. Neville. He confirmed the details about collecting Dr Tarrant and waiting for one soldier to arrive. He then stated:

> I was walking westwards with the shore on my right between the two sentries on the front right of the Lewis gun when I felt something hit me as I thought on my right hip. At that moment I thought I saw a flash from a point a few yards to the right of the shore end of the pier. I then saw our Lewis gun open fire, but I cannot say how many shots.[15]

It can only be presumed that the evidence of these witnesses was enough to satisfy the court as to what happened and that it was not necessary to hear from any of those casualties who would have been able to testify. For instance, one of the casualties, Gunner V.F. Voyce, who was wounded in the foot, was able to give an interview to the *Daily Chronicle* a few days later while in Fishguard, en route to hospital in Southampton. He clearly had a good view of the attack because he was able to say of it: 'the first round went too high, but the next round swept low and caught several of us as we dropped. There was a great commotion, and some of our pals jumped into the sea, fearing further fire...The rebels were poor marksmen or they would have killed us'.[16] Voyce was in the hospital on Spike Island, only a very short distance from the court while it was in session.

The incident was witnessed by many other people and their accounts were reported in the widespread newspaper coverage that ensued. Some of these accounts were very detailed and they would have undoubtedly been of value to the inquiry. However, it was a military court of inquiry by the British army and evidence was heard from military personnel only, despite the fact that five of the injured personnel were civilians, and one of them, Maurice Hurley, was Irish. Nonetheless, evidence from two civic guards who witnessed the attack was taken in the form of written statements that were attached to the findings of the inquiry. One of the guards, Sgt. Harry McNamara, stated that he heard gunfire while in the barracks dayroom and he rushed out in time to see a Rolls-Royce car with four men in 'National Army uniforms' sweep

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[15] Ibid. p. 7. Neville's testimony is odd. His statement that he was walking 'westwards with the shore on his right' is contradictory. In Cobh, if he was walking westwards, the shore would have been on his left.
[16] *Irish Independent*, 28 Mar. 1924, quoting *Daily Chronicle*, 28 Mar. 1924.

by, and that when it was no more than sixty yards from the barracks it opened fire with a Lewis gun on HMS *Scythe*.[17]

Some of these matters raise the question of why the Irish government was content to leave the matter to a British court of inquiry and did not initiate, or even seek to initiate, an inquiry of its own—especially when it had doubts later on about the findings relating to Capt. Neville and the compensation he was subsequently awarded.

An inquest into the death of Pte. Aspinall was held in Cobh on 24 March—the same day on which the court of inquiry was being held. Two local doctors, Dr Alexandra Ledlie and Dr J. J. O'Connor, gave evidence confirming that Aspinall died at about 8.00 pm while in hospital on Spike Island. The only other witness to be called was L/Cpl Brockelhurst, who had given evidence at the court of inquiry earlier in the day. His evidence was that he saw Aspinall running back towards the launch and some moments later saw him lying on the landing stage. He also saw 'two squirts of flame from the car'.[18] His testimony was in line with what he had told the court of inquiry.

The reaction of the Irish government was both prompt and positive. President Cosgrave made a full statement to the Dáil on 25 March in which he unreservedly condemned the outrage, describing it as 'a stain upon the honour of our country'. More practically, he announced that a reward of £10,000 would be awarded for information leading to the detection of the perpetrators.[19] Cosgrave also announced to the Dáil that the Irish Free State would accept responsibility for compensating the victims and/or their relatives for injuries and loss sustained.[20] Ramsay McDonald especially welcomed the offer of compensation.[21] This prompt action in making these unsolicited offers was well received in British government circles and it was used on several occasions by the British government as an example of the Irish government's bona fides when replying to questions in parliament and in newspapers about progress in detecting the perpetrators.[22] It was also well received in both

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[17] Statement of Sgt. Harry McNamara, 22 Mar. 1924 (TNA, WO 32/4850).
[18] *Freeman's Journal*, 25 Mar. 1924.
[19] Cosgrave, *Dáil Eireann deb.*., xi, cols 2292-3, 25 Mar. 1924.
[20] Ibid.
[21] McDonald to Cosgrave, 26 Mar. 1924 (TNA, WO 32/4850).
[22] *Manchester Guardian*, 4 July 1924.

English and Irish newspapers,[23] but the *Manchester Guardian* added the more prosaic comment that 'one consequence...from Friday night's occurrence is that business traffic between the shops at Queenstown and the British garrison may be curtailed, if not ended...'[24]. In London, the Colonial Secretary, J.H. Thomas, informed the House of Commons that the action 'has been repudiated by every political party in Ireland' and that the government accepted that situation.[25]

In his announcement Cosgrave did not actually state that the perpetrators were not National Army personnel so it must be taken that this was a given. It is also noteworthy that he referred to a single attack on the personnel disembarking from the launch, making no reference to the second attack an hour or more later, so it would appear that he was unaware of it.

Senior officers in the National Army immediately sought to deflect any suspicion that disaffected army personnel were in any way involved. Major General Brennan O/C Southern Command and Col. MacMahon, O/C Cork District each sought to assure Col. Haywood that the perpetrators were known 'Irregulars' and were not army mutineers.[26] MacMahon told Haywood that it was the work of 'Irregulars' in Free State army uniforms[27] and Brennan corroborated this to the extent of stating that the car, a Rolls-Royce, was known as 'belonging to a band of 'Irregulars' in the district just north of Knockraha, some twelve miles north of Queenstown' and that one of the raiders had been recognised as 'Sandy O'Donovan, who was a notorious Irregular for many months past'.[28] Then, following an interview with Gen. Eoin O'Duffy, Kevin O'Higgins also assured the Colonial Office that officers of the National Army were not involved, pointing out that the army did not possess a Rolls Royce car whereas it was known that 'Irregulars' in the Cork area had two such cars. He also stated:

> It has been stated to me that after the firing the occupants of the Rolls Royce car shouted "UP Dalton and the Republic". This if

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[23] *Sunday Independent*, 23 Mar. 1924; *Manchester Guardian*, 24 Mar 1924.
[24] *Manchester Guardian*, 24 Mar. 1924.
[25] *The Times*, 25 Mar. 1924.
[26] Haywood to War Office, 22 Mar. 1923; 23 Mar. 1924 (TNA, CO 739/26).
[27] Haywood to War Office, 22 Mar. 1924 (TNA, WO 32/4850).
[28] Ibid.

true seems to me rather like a belated attempt to give the crime the complexion of being the action of mutinous F.S. officers.[29]

Later, Major-General Brennan also explained that 'Irregulars' did have access to Irish Free State army uniforms because uniforms were known to have been stolen at various times. This was true because it was reported that on one of these occasions anti-treaty forces had captured 120 Irish Free State uniforms in Kenmare eighteen months earlier, along with 135 rifles and 15,000 rounds of ammunition.[30]

Col. MacMahon later told Haywood that the car was known to have been stolen by 'Irregulars' from Lord Dunraven (the impetus behind the Wyndham land act) some months earlier.[31] A few weeks later, on 14 May, the Irish Free State government issued a proclamation offering 'a reward of £10,000 to the first person or persons giving information leading to the arrest and conviction' of five named persons 'for having participated in the murderous attack by armed men on a party of unarmed British soldiers and civilians on 21st March'.[32] The persons named were 'Daniel Donovan, known as Sando Donovan, St. John's Tce., Cork; Frank Bustead, Blarney, Cork; Jim Grey, Hayfield, Cork; Miah Grey, Hayfield; Peter O'Shea, King St., Cork'. A full description of each man was given, including work details. There is no evidence that any information resulted from this offer at the time, and none of the men were ever apprehended or charged.

Seven other men were simultaneously arrested in various parts of Dublin on 29 October by 'flying squads of detectives in motor cars' and charged with the murder of Pt. Aspinall. These were named as 'Matthew Connolly (32), motor driver, Ballybough; William Keane (26), clerk, Rathmines; Ed. O'Rourke (27), labourer, East Road; Patrick Mullally (28), motor driver, South Summer Street; John Byrne (26), Church Street; Arthur Kelly (22), compositor, Hanover Street; and John Harrington, alias O'Brien (24), insurance agent, Camden Row'.[33] Another man, Joseph O'Connor (42), clerk, of Fairbrother's Field, Dublin was arrested and charged in the Northern

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[29] Loughnane telegram to Whiskard, 22 Mar. 1924 (TNA, CO 739/26).
[30] Somerville to Admiralty, 15 Sept. 1922 (TNA, CO 739/3).
[31] Haywood to War Office, 5 Apr. 1924 (TNA, WO 32/4850).
[32] *Manchester Guardian*, 14 May 1924; *Irish Times*, 14 May 1924.
[33] *Manchester Guardian*, 29 Oct. 1924; *Irish Times*, 29 Oct. 1924; *Irish Independent*, 29 Oct. 1924.

District Court, Dublin on the following day.[34] All were remanded for a week but at the subsequent hearing they were discharged as the authorities had decided not to proceed with the case.[35] Yet two more men, William Sheehan, a blacksmith, and John O'Leary, apprentice, from Carrignavar, Cork, were arrested and brought to Dublin to appear before the Dublin District Court, [36] but were released the following day without charge.[37]

The attack took place at a time of upheaval in the national army. The Executive Council was in the process of reducing the size of the army from about 50,000 men, following the civil war, to a more appropriate peacetime number, resulting in the mutiny on 9 March of disaffected IRB members of the army, and the subsequent dismissal of the Minister for Defence and the Army Council for taking action against the mutineers without the Executive Council's approval. There was considerable division within the army during this period and there were rumours that the four men who committed the atrocity were, in fact, army officers. This was completely discounted by Eoin O'Duffy, who had taken over as army GOC, who claimed that the publication of the names of the suspected perpetrators 'has removed from the minds of all reasonable people the suspicion that the army was involved in the affair'.[38] He also claimed that the rumour was started by 'Irregulars' and by British troops and officers at Spike Island'.[39] He did not produce any evidence of this, but army intelligence at the time was poor, and O'Duffy used the opportunity to complain about the shortage of intelligence officers at his disposal: 'in the recent Cobh outrage I had no officer to send to Cork except the Director of Army Intelligence himself'.[40] However, he was satisfied with the information that Sando Donovan was O/C of the 1st Cork Brigade, that he was operating independently of the Irregular GHQ and southern division, but there was no doubt that he was responsible for the outrage. Duffy also advised the council

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[34] *Irish Times*, 30 Oct. 1924.
[35] *Irish Times*, 5 Nov. 1924; *Irish Independent*, 5 Nov. 1924.
[36] *Irish Independent*, 3 Nov. 1924
[37] *Irish Times*, 4 Nov. 1924.
[38] GOC Forces report to Executive Council, 12 June 1924, Ernest Blythe Papers (UCDA, P24/222).
[39] Ibid.
[40] GOC Forces report to Executive Council, 7 Apr. 1924, Ernest Blythe Papers (UCDA, P24/221).

that he was not optimistic of catching Donovan because he had 'the district in a state of terror and the people believe he cannot be caught'.[41]

Newspaper coverage of the incident was extensive and it included many eyewitness accounts. All reports were based on information received from local or Irish government sources. The only information that emanated from the British military authorities was a list of the people who had been wounded during the initial attack, including the name of Capt. Neville, and this was issued through General Eoin O'Duffy.[42] There appears to have been a complete clamp-down on information from local British sources and this made it impossible for newspaper reporters to get statements from any of the victims or from any of the British military personnel, although *The Times* report carrying the list of casualties described it as having been issued by the War Office.[43] The *Sunday Independent* was particularly aggrieved at what it described as 'the amazing reticence of the British military authorities on Spike Island who refused point blank to give any information whatever...'.[44] Despite this, the published reports were generally in line with evidence heard at the court of inquiry. The *Irish Times*' reportage included an American businessman's story of how he saw, from the lounge of the Queen's Hotel, 'a yellowish high-powered touring car racing up from the pier head. As it came to within twenty yards of the hotel it slowed down...an officer in the car pointed to the destroyer...the man [beside him]...rested the gun on the side of the car...Just as they came level with me there were two, rapid bursts of fire from the machine gun'.[45] The *Sunday Independent* included the story of another observer who, while walking along the pier, 'saw two machine guns thrust out over the side of the car...firing on the military who were coming up the pier'.[46] Another eyewitness, a woman in a shop, described the four men in the car as being 'unshaven...and a very queer-looking party of officers'.[47] A member of the Urban District Council, Mr B. Dowling, said he saw two machine guns placed on the side of the car and 'the next thing I saw was

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[41] Ibid.
[42] *Irish Times*, 24 Mar. 1924.
[43] *The Times*, 25 Mar. 1924.
[44] *Sunday Independent*, 23 Mar. 1924.
[45] *Irish Times*, 24 Mar. 1924.
[46] *Sunday Independent*, 23 Mar. 1924.
[47] *Irish Independent*, 24 Mar. 1924.

soldiers falling. They fell before it the same as corn before a scythe. It was a wave of men falling'.[48]

With such evidence that the disembarking passengers, estimated to be about sixty, were subjected to the fire of two Lewis guns from distances ranging from about twenty yards to sixty yards, it is remarkable that only one was killed. One undoubted reason for this is the medical attention that they received so quickly. The official classification of the condition of the victims was one dead, eight 'dangerously ill', eight 'seriously wounded', and six 'slightly wounded'. Neville's condition was not classified.[49] All casualties had been rushed back to Spike Island for treatment in the military hospital where they were attended to by Major H.C. Hildreth and Col. Walker R.A.M.C. doctors; Capt. Holland from the Irish Free State military hospital at Haulbowline; two surgeons from Cork city hospitals, Dr C.Y. Pearson and Dr T. Dundon; Dr A. Ledlie; three other local general practitioners; and three nurses from Cobh. The War Office later sent letters of appreciation to all of them. (The War Office also sent a bill to the Executive Council for £269.6*s.* 9*d.* that the doctors had sent to the War Office).[50] It is unquestionable that the prompt and expert medical aid was a significant factor in keeping the number of fatalities so low. Another reason was probably the unwieldiness of guns. Lewis guns are long, heavy machine guns that are designed to be fired with the gunner lying prone and the gun supported on a bipod. They would be difficult to handle in a car, even an open-topped one, by men in an agitated state of mind, and a driver anxious to get away as soon as possible.

The *Sunday Independent*, in its report of the incident on 23 March, included a statement, the significance of which was not realised until a week later:

> Almost an hour and a half after the terrible incident the citizens received another shock. On this occasion, two British officers, accompanied by two armed soldiers, came ashore from a launch and walked up the pier. One of them fired a shot and immediately there was a stampede. It was soon ascertained however that they had returned for the purpose of bringing back

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[48] *Freeman's Journal*, 24 Mar. 1924; *Southern Star*, 29 Mar 1924.
[49] Haywood to War Office, 22 Mar. 1924 (TNA, WO 32/4850).
[50] J.H. Thomas to T.M. Healy, 16 June 1924 (NAI, GOVG1/F347).

any of the garrison who happened to be ashore at the time of the occurrence. Anxiety... was thus allayed.[51]

While some of these facts may be incorrect, the report undoubtedly referred to the second shooting incident that was described to the court of enquiry and the details of which had been withheld from the Irish government.

The *Irish Independent* followed this up with a report on 29 March emphatically denying an assertion made that Capt. Neville was fired on and wounded when he landed on the pier. This impression was reinforced by the list of casualties that had been issued earlier in the week in which Neville's name was included in the attack on disembarking passengers. The fact that newspapers may have published reports of such an incident that were somewhat inaccurate would not normally be important except that Cosgrave had offered to pay compensation to victims of what he understood to be one shooting.

In his Dáil speech Cosgrave did not refer to the second attack, and was clearly unaware of it. Neither did he make reference to it in his letter to Ramsay McDonald when he suggested that the 'Wood-Renton Commission' be asked to deal with claims for compensation. This was the Compensation (Ireland) Commission based at 5 Ely Place, Dublin, under the chairmanship of Sir Alexander Wood-Renton K.C., which was requested to determine what compensation should be paid and to communicate directly with the Colonial Office, Irish Branch, London, on all matters relevant to the cases.[52] (An interesting aside is that some of the injuries were so serious that as late as 18 August, the O.C. Royal Victoria Hospital, Netley, wrote to the War Office to say that none of the patients remaining in hospital were considered to be fit enough to attend a hearing of their case to determine their compensation).[53] Realisation that something was amiss surfaced at a regular meeting between the War Office and Colonial Office when the representative of the Colonial Office requested that a copy of the proceedings of the court of inquiry be sent to Lionel Curtis.[54] At this time Curtis was an advisor to the Colonial Secretary, in which capacity he worked to ensure the observance of the treaty

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[51] *Sunday Independent*, 23 Mar. 1924.
[52] J. Brennan, Dept of Finance to Compensation (Ireland) Commission, 29 Mar. 1924 (TNA, WO 32/4850).
[53] O.C. Royal Victoria Hospital to War Office, 18 Aug. 1924 (TNA, WO 32/4850).
[54] W.O. minute sheet 45/gen no/3005, handwritten note, 27 Apr. 1924 (TNA, WO 32/4850).

obligations on both sides.[55] Sometime later, G. Critchley of the Colonial Office urgently sought a copy of the proceedings because he was 'having difficulty in convincing the IFS that Capt. Nevill [sic] was not wounded accidently'.[56] G.D. Roseway, a senior official in the War Office, added another note shortly after stating that 'the Irish government have definitely asked for the whole proceedings in connection with the wounding of Capt. Neville'. He suggested that partial disclosure could be given.[57] Critchley replied, formalising the matter in a letter to confirm an agreement between the two departments that 'we should furnish the Government with the evidence of the seventh and eighth witnesses, a copy of the plan produced, and the third and fourth paragraphs of the findings.'[58] Critchley also wrote a letter on the same day to Major Hutton of the War Office that is revealing:

> As you know, the Free State Government have privately and quite unofficially told us that they entirely discredit the suggestion that there was a second attack on this occasion, and as this attitude contains at least the elements of trouble, I sounded you out last week to see if the War Office could see their way to withdraw Captain Neville's name from the list of casualties referred to the Commission for compensation purposes. *They couldn't so I have sent forward the relevant extracts*...The line I anticipated the Free State might take is that Mr Cosgrave's offer of compensation was purely in connection with the attack from the motor car, the details of which became known all over the world, and not to the subsequent attack of which up to the present the public knows nothing. *The allegation of course wd. be that Neville was shot accidently by his own people.* I think, as a matter of fact, that we have avoided this danger which...might develop into a rather difficult situation; and I am fairly satisfied that at least some of the Ministers...will not run the risk of unpleasantness by raising the point...[59]

There is little doubt that Critchley's analysis was right because Capt. Neville was subsequently awarded compensation of £300. However, there is

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[55] Alex May, 'Curtis, Lionel George (1872–1955)', *Oxford DNB* (www.oxforddnb.com) (3 Apr. 2009).
[56] War Office minute sheet 45/gen no/3005, handwritten note, undated (TNA, WO 32/4850).
[57] War Office handwritten note 2 May 1924 (TNA, WO 32/4851).
[58] Critchley to Roseway, 14 May 1924 (TNA, WO 32/4851).
[59] Critchley to Hutton, 15 May 1924 (TNA, WO 32/4850). (text in italics is handwritten). Another handwritten memo in the file states 'Col. Heywood O/C commanding the garrison at Spike Island stated to one of our officers that he believed the wounding of Capt. Neville was accidental. Further that Capt. Neville's automatic revolver jammed and that he was holding an enquiry into the whole affair'. An annotation at the bottom of the memo states 'President Cosgrave [indecipherable] handed me the above on Monday in Dublin' and it is signed 'T.J [scribble] 2/4/24'.

also little doubt that the Irish government was justified in being dubious about the claim. If a second attack had been made on British troops why would the War Office want to keep it a secret, both from the public and from the Irish government? Perhaps having to admit that one of its officers had been shot in the buttocks by one of his own men was just too much of an embarrassment for the military, because it is almost certain that this is what happened. By Capt. Neville's own testimony, he was walking on the pier between his Lewis gunner and the point at which he 'thought' he 'saw a flash from a gun'. The other witness (the Lewis gunner) did not see any flashes even though he was facing the shore, although he did hear 'the sound of bullets flying past'. This begs the question of why he would open fire directly towards the populated town if he saw nothing, especially when, at approximately 8.30 pm in March, it would have been dark.

However, the Irish government was probably right not to pursue the matter to an extreme. The shooting had already received worldwide attention, and the government would not have wanted ongoing publicity showing it was unable to maintain public safety in the new Irish Free State. It was better for the matter to be resolved as quickly as possible, and £300 was a small amount to pay for this. However, the government's failure to retain some measure of control over the inquiry was unwise and could have led to more unfavourable consequences.

The Compensation Commission continued its proceedings over a number of months and a final list of the awards was forwarded by the Colonial Office to the War Office on 14 November 1924.[60] By standards of awards and pay at the time these awards were not ungenerous, except that the recipients did not benefit from them because the War Office and Colonial Office decided that any awards would be reflected in any pensions that would otherwise be due to the soldiers. A handwritten note by B. Grindle of the War Office, confirming a Colonial Office letter of 31 March 1924, states that the Colonial Office 'will notify us immediately any Wood-Renton award is notified to them. We shall then deduct the annuity value of such award from the pension...in

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[60] Colonial Office to War Office, 'List of compensation awards made by the Compensation (Ireland) Commission', 14 Nov. 1924 (TNA, WO 32/4850).

accordance with Treasury instructions'.[61] A subsequent letter from the War Office to the Colonial Office carries the handwritten addendum: 'Strictly, the Irish Govt. should pay us and leave us to deal with this.'[62] The widowed mother of Pte. Aspinall was entitled to a weekly pension of 12*s*.6*d*. but the War Office decided that this was less than the annuity value of her award so no pension was paid to her.[63]

There is a sequel to this incident that occurred many years later. In December 1931, the British Consul General in New York was approached by a man, unnamed, who claimed to know the whereabouts of 'Sando Donovan'[64], and who was prepared to divulge this in return for the reward of £10,000. The informant was referred to W.J.D. Macauley in the Irish Consulate General in New York. Macauley met him later and was informed that Donovan had a speakeasy on the west side but had given it up. The man gave Donovan's address to Macauley, and said that Donovan had come to America as a member of a ship's crew and had deserted on arrival. He also said that immigration and police authorities had been enquiring about Donovan, but he felt that this would have been in relation to his illegal immigrant status.[65] The matter was referred to the Department of Justice, which was very reluctant to pursue the matter and advised Macauley to tell his informant that he would have to produce *prima facie* evidence of guilt before any reward would be considered. The department was not interested in applying for extradition because of the difficulty in making a case against Donovan after so many years. Its final words on the matter were 'it would please us better to leave him where he is at present'.[66]

The attack on the soldiers in Cobh received a great deal of publicity not only in Ireland and Britain but also in America, and it was generally perceived to be an outrageous attack and was universally condemned. During the days and weeks following the shooting, county and urban councils throughout Ireland passed motions denouncing it and expressing sympathy with the

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[61] War Office minute, 15 Apr. 1924 (TNA, WO 32/4850).
[62] R. Paterson to G.W. Whiskard, 31 Mar. 1924 (TNA, WO 32/4850). Text underlinings as in original.
[63] War Office minute, 28 Apr. 1924 (TNA, WO 32/4850).
[64] Daniel Donovan was also widely known as 'Sandow' Donovan.
[65] W.J.D.Macauley, Irish Consulate General to Dept. External Affairs, 21 Dec. 1931 and 7 Jan. 1932 (NAI, DFA 44/9).
[66] S.A.Roche, Dept. of Justice to Dept. External Affairs, 21 Jan 1932 (NAI, DFA 44/9).

victims and their families. Dublin Corporation was one of the first to do so in a motion 'condemning the brutal and cowardly attack'.[67] Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington supported the motion but qualified this by stating that Irish people should not feel any disgrace because she saw 'the hand of the English provocateur in the incident as well as in the Phoenix Park murders and in the shooting of Sir Henry Wilson'![68]

The attack was important not just because of the death and injuries juries that it caused but for other reasons also. It was intended to cause international embarrassment to the Irish government rather than the British government and at a time when it would cause the maximum damage. This was at the height of the crisis of the army revolt and it happened just two days after the government had demanded the resignation of the Army Council

The attack was also significant because it was so unusual. It was an isolated incident that was not representative of the generally good relations that existed between the local population and the military in the treaty ports. Despite Britain continuing to have military and naval forces in the Irish Free State after independence there was no concerted antagonism towards personnel attached to the forts, but it was a reminder of the tensions that did exist below the surface amongst a significant proportion of the population. The incident was well handled by President Cosgrave, and his prompt and positive action in dealing with it helped to save the new state from much adverse publicity abroad.[69]

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[67] *Southern Star*, 29 Mar. 1924.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Copies of much of the inter-governmental correspondence relating to this incident, including some of the correspondence cited here, are also held in the Governor-General's files GOVG1/F347 at the National Archives of Ireland.

6. Agreement and practice: difficulties in operating under the treaty

The Articles of Agreement were the framework by which the new Irish Free State would be governed and by which British forces would operate. While there was ideological tension between the two governments the evidence shows that for most of the time this did not extend to everyday working arrangements between them. Both sides had to learn how to co-operate under the new political system in the country, and as the Articles of Agreement did not, and could not, cover all the difficulties that were likely to arise in the normal operation of the forts, these had to be settled by discussion. When problems did arise, the attempts by both governments to resolve them by pragmatic means, and without there being a public awareness of either the problems or their resolution, reflects the practical, working relationship that existed. It also helps to explain why the occupation of the forts during first years of independence was of such little concern to the public.

While the treaty was finally ratified at the end of December 1922, it was not until the end of the Civil War in May 1923 that life in the defended ports settled down to a normal peacetime routine, albeit under greatly changed circumstances. There were now no more than eight hundred British troops in the country, including those of the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA), Royal Army Service Corps (RASC), Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC), Royal Army Ordnance Corps (RAOC), Royal Engineers (RE), Royal Signals and other support arms of the army, compared to approximately 23,000 infantry troops plus seven cavalry regiments and one armoured car company in 1920.[1] One estimate puts the total number of troops in Ireland during 1920 and 1922 at between 35,000 and 40,000.[2] This greatly reduced army was also working in a new environment that was effectively a foreign country, in which it did not have the freedom of movement that it had enjoyed previously and in which the new country's laws had to be respected and it was in travel between the forts that the first of a number of difficulties began to arise.

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[1] Cabinet memorandum by Sec. State for War 15 June 1920 (TNA, CAB 24/107).
[2] Arthur Mitchell, *Revolutionary Government in Ireland: Dáil Éireann 1919-1922* (Dublin, 1993), p. 204.

The three treaty ports were not self-contained units: each defended port area comprised between two and four individual forts, each of which was a self-contained unit that was separated by sea (in the case of Fort Westmoreland on Spike Island) or by several miles of road. While the army had control over lands on which these forts were located, it did not have authority over the roads that joined them and on which troops and supplies had to be transported. The preferred communication between the forts was by sea but this was not possible in every case and it was not always convenient in some. In the Cobh command, and for travel between Bere Island and the mainland, the army had the use of a number of War Department launches and smaller motorised boats. However, it was not always possible to use the launches in bad weather, and it was not necessarily the most appropriate form of conveyance, especially when goods and personnel had to be transported just relatively short distances. The advantage of sea transport to the army was that it allowed it to operate within its own designated areas without having to travel through Irish Free State territory. However, as it was not possible for the army to operate so independently, road transport was used routinely. The bases at Lough Swilly and Bere Island each had a small number of vans or lorries (one in Berehaven and three in Lough Swilly) that were used for transporting troops and supplies.[3] The army in Berehaven had no need to keep an official van or car on the mainland even for collecting supplies because, as the Gardaí had noted, stores of fresh food such as bread and meat were purchased locally and delivered daily by local contractors to a War Department launch that called to Castletownbere pier twice a day.[4] One of the passengers who was always on board the launch was a British soldier, in uniform, who visited the post office in Castletown twice a day to collect and deliver mail for the fort.[5]

Cobh harbour defences were well equipped with four motor launches with varying capacities for thirty-five to two hundred passengers, and six smaller boats capable of carrying between five to fifteen passengers.[6] Surprisingly though, even as late as 1931 the War Department maintained no

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[3] Lt-Col. C. Goldsmith to Sec. Donegal Co. Co., 13 Mar. 1930 (NAI, DFA file 21/355).
[4] Chief Superintendent to Garda Commissioner, 2 May 1934 (NAI, DFA 21/355)
[5] Asst. Commissioner D. Coillte to Sec., Dept .of Justice, 3 Nov. 1936 (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[6] 'Queenstown interim defence scheme 1931', n.d. (TNA, WO 192/34), pp 12, 31.

motorised vehicles in the Cobh command and it was normal practice for the military to hire both motorised and horse-drawn vehicles locally for transporting troops and supplies.[7] The standing defence procedures for the forts in Cobh advised commanders that 'a number of Irish farm carts can be hired locally' and they included the names of four garages from which motors could be hired.[8] Even this did not solve the problem entirely because there was only a footpath between Fort Templebreedy and Fort Camden, so road travel between them necessitated a westwards diversion through Crosshaven, adding about four miles to the journey. Communication between Spike Island, Fort Camden (on the west side of the harbour) and Fort Carlisle (on the east side) was by water. Fort Templebreedy (on the west side) was accessible only by road. The landing facilities at Fort Carlisle were not very good, the landing pier being unusable in adverse weather conditions, and this could leave the fort inaccessible for several days.[9]

It is somewhat surprising that no motorised vans or lorries were held in the Cobh command because it meant that the only communication with Fort Templebreedy was by locally hired vehicles. For the garrison to be reliant on the local population for transport suggests that relations between the army and locals were both stable and cordial. The reliance on local transport extended even to conveying ammunition to Fort Templebreedy. Whenever shells were needed for target practice, which was about three times a year, they were shipped by launch from Spike Island to Crosshaven, then transferred to locally-hired lorries for transport across Irish Free State territory to the fort, guarded by an armed escort of British soldiers.[10] Also, uniformed soldiers, occasionally armed, frequently walked along the footpath between Forts Camden and Templebreedy.[11]

None of these practices seem to have been the cause of any disturbance or complaint and this indicates the ease with which all of them took place and how they were accepted by the local people as normal, everyday occurrences.

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[7] Ibid..
[8] Ibid.
[9] 'Queenstown interim defence scheme 1931', n.d. (TNA, WO 192/34).
[10] Asst. Commissioner D. MacCoillte to Sec. Dept. of Justice, 3 Nov. 1936 (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[11] Ibid.

All roads between the forts within the ports were in Irish Free State territory, and as time progressed minor legal obstacles began to emerge. People within the defended ports areas had been well-used to seeing troops and supplies being transported, so the sight of such activity after independence was no novelty. However, as those in the public service, especially customs officers and Gardaí, became more familiar with their new responsibilities, certain long-established practices came under scrutiny. Most of these difficulties related to activities connected with Lough Swilly.

For administrative purposes Lough Swilly and Belfast ports were under the command of the GOC Western Command in England. This meant that there was on-going contact between the two ports, some of it by sea but much, of necessity, by land. In fact, the garrison at Lough Swilly drew its routine supplies from Derry, where British troops were stationed, and Royal Navy assistance was only required on special occasions.[12]

The two Lough Swilly forts of Dunree and Lenan were both on the eastern side of the lough, Lenan being five miles north of Dunree and Dunree being seven miles to the north of Buncrana, the naval base. There was a Royal Navy base on the western side of Lough Swilly but this was just an oil storage depot. Travel between Lenan, Dunree and Buncrana was necessarily by road, and this was done by two 15-cwt vans, one based in Dunree and the other based in Lenan. There was also an ambulance in Dunree.[13]

These vans, invariably driven by soldiers in uniform, continued to travel between the forts and Northern Ireland without hindrance until late 1925 when they began to be stopped by customs officers in the Irish Free State who informed the drivers that they would not be allowed in future to carry goods across the border without proper authorisation issued by the Revenue Commissioners. The Army Council complained to T.M. Healy, the Governor General, who raised the matter with the President.[14] The Executive Council decided that no good would be served by creating bureaucratic hurdles, so the

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[12] Admiralty memorandum, undated, but probably Feb. 1923 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).
[13] Lt-Col. C. Goldsmith to Sec. Donegal Co. Co., 13 Mar. 1930 (NAI, DFA 21/355).
[14] Healy to President, 5 Jan. 1926 (NAI, DFA 21/355).

Dominions Office was advised that the lorries would be allowed to pass without the necessity of being in possession of special passes.[15]

Matters progressed satisfactorily for a few weeks until Gardaí then began stopping army vehicles and informing the drivers that they needed a driving licence to drive in the Irish Free State. Again, Healy received the complaint, and following consultations in Dublin between the departments of Finance, Local Government, External Affairs, and Justice, the Executive Council agreed that the matter be resolved by 'waiving the necessity for the possession of Irish Free State driving licences by British military drivers of mechanised transport vehicles passing from Northern Ireland to the forts at Lough Swilly'.[16]

After that, customs officers started asking army drivers about importation duty that had to be paid on all motor vehicles imported into the state. This followed the introduction of new regulations requiring a duty of 33⅓% to be paid on such vehicles, and customs officers had been ordered to apply it to British troops stationed in the Irish Free State. Healy, once again, was obliged to take up the matter and he responded by asking the government to 'consider the possibility of granting special facilities to the military personnel on the strength of the units in Lough Swilly'.[17] This turned out to be the subject of much discussion and correspondence once more between the departments of Justice, Finance, Local Government, and the Dominions Office. The matter was resolved by allowing military vehicles being used for military purposes to be declared exempt from the import duty.[18] It was also decided to allow officers' privately-owned cars to be brought into the country duty-free but on condition that they could not be sold without being exported and re-imported in the normal way. The owner/driver had to be issued with a Certificate of Identity, agreed by the Irish Free State and Britain, which had to be produced by the driver on request by the Gardaí or customs.[19] It is not known how many availed of this concession in Lough Swilly or Cobh, but in 1934, four of the five officers on Bere Island had private cars that they kept on

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[15] Healy to Dominions Office, 8 Feb. 1926 (NAI, DFA 21/355).
[16] Ibid. 7 June 1926 (NAI, DFA 21/355).
[17] Healy to Dept.of the Taoiseach, 14 March 1927 (NAI, DFA 21/355).
[18] Dept. of Finance to Dominions Office, 27 Sept. 1929 (NAI, DFA 21/355).
[19] Ibid.

the mainland in Castletownbere: Major R.B. Rowitt, the Commanding Officer, had a five-seater Morris Oxford; Captain Whitman had a two-seater Hillman; Captain Martin had a four-seater Swift; and Lt. Graham had a Baby Austin. Major Rowitt's car had a road tax certificate taken out with Cork Co. Council[20] which means that it must either have been bought in the state or the duty had been paid on it. The drivers of the three other cars did not avail of this concession and their cars were driven under International Circulation Permits.[21] These permits were issued under the Road Vehicles (International Circulation) (Incoming Vehicles) Regulations, 1925, which provided for cars to be imported temporarily. A disadvantage of the permits for the officers was that they were only allowed to keep the cars for a maximum of four months, after which they had to be exported. Even this concession was limited because if an applicant for a permit had held a permit in the preceding year, then the new permit would be for four months less the number of days for which the previous permit was in force.[22]

However, resolving the problems of import duty and driving licences did not end matters for in 1930 the Department of Local Government realised that there was no agreement between the two governments under which British army vehicles had been granted exemption from payment of the annual motor licence duty (road tax) to the appropriate local licensing authority. Accordingly, the department informed External Affairs that 'in the absence of an agreement the Donegal Co. Council would be informed the motor licence duty is payable to them in respect of the vehicles.'[23] This was not what the government wanted so Local Government was informed that these vehicles were to be declared to be exempt from tax.[24]

It would appear that exact protocol had to be followed when applying for these exemptions because, in 1934, the senior RASC officer in Berehaven made an application to Cork Co. Council for exemption from duty and licence fees for a 15-cwt Morris van. This was referred to Local Government who refused the application because that the application had not been made by the

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[20] Chief Supt., Cork, to Garda Commissioner, 2 May 1934 (NAI, DFA 21/355).
[21] Ibid.
[22] The Road Vehicles (International Circulation) (Incoming Vehicles) Regulations, 1925 (www.irishstatutebook.ie) (20 Jan. 2010).
[23] Dept. of Local Government to Dept. of Finance, 11 Apr. 1930 (NAI, DFA 21/355).
[24] Dept. of Finance to Dept. of Local Government, 29 Aug. 1930 (NAI, DFA 21/355).

British government, and insisted that the fees be paid. The RASC officer was advised to seek exemption through the Dominions Office.[25] The RASC in Cobh got the same response later in the same year so it seems that the Cobh command had at last managed to acquire motorised transport of their own.[26]

Leopardstown Park Hospital in Dublin, under the control of the British Ministry of Pensions, provided care for Irish ex-servicemen who had been wounded or disabled during the First World War. It operated two ambulances for which exemption from tax was made. The Department of Finance decided to grant an exemption but advised the hospital that application would have to come from the Dominions Office before it could come into effect. The Ministry of Pensions decided not to make a formal application and paid the licence fees to Dublin Co. Council.[27]

A final matter to arise relating to motor vehicles was that of insurance. The Road Traffic Act of 1933 rendered the Minister for Finance liable for damages for negligent driving of vehicles owned by the state, and the Department of Local Government realised that 'British government are under no such liability in similar circumstances'.[28] When the matter was raised with the Dominions Office, the British government decided that the Army Council would take insurance for all War Department vehicles against third party risks to cover all travel in Ireland.[29]

Another, earlier, exemption that appears to have been granted in favour of military vehicles was payment of excise duty on petrol. In 1923, the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes, on behalf of the Navy and Army Canteen Board, claimed a refund of duty paid in respect of 'motor spirit fuel' used by lorries and vans 'solely for the conveyance of goods and burden'.[30] The claim was accepted by the Revenue Commissioners, with some exclusions, and a refund of £28.1s.9d was made.[31]

Officers of the Royal Navy were traditionally entitled to purchase duty-free wine and tobacco while on service, and ratings were entitled to purchase

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[25] Dept. of Local Government to Dept. of Finance 7 Apr. 1934 (NAI, DFA 21/355).
[26] Ibid., 13 Oct. 1934.
[27] G. Powell, Leopardstown Park Hosp to Dept. of Local Government, 3 June 1930 (NAI, DFA 21/355).
[28] Dept. of Local Government to Dept. of External Affairs, 7 Apr. 1934 (NAI, DFA 21/355).
[29] Dominions Office to Minister for External Affairs, 6 Feb. 1935 (NAI, DFA 21/355).
[30] Ministry of Local Government to Ministry of Finance 25 Feb. 1923 (NAI FIN 1/3239).
[31] Ministry of Local Government to Ministry of Finance, 8 Dec. 1923 (NAI, FIN 1/3239).

tobacco. Originally, the practice had been intended for the benefit of those at sea but it was soon extended to those at shore establishments. Army personnel could also avail of the concession. In 1919, the UK Board of Customs and Excise decided to withdraw the privilege from those on shore. This generated a storm of protest from navy commanders who argued that the concession 'was a time immemorial privilege' and that to remove it would cause serious resentment throughout the service. It was also pointed out that to remove the privilege would only create an even bigger problem that would be impossible to control: smuggling.[32]

The practice in Queenstown was for ratings to draw their tobacco on a nominated day each month from an officer who recorded the purchases to ensure that only enough was being taken for personal use.[33] Officers were also allowed to draw duty-free wine, a privilege not extended to ratings. After independence, British naval personnel in the Irish Free State continued to enjoy the right, but in 1923, there were concerns that the new government could be unaware of the practice and might not permit it. It was decided that the Colonial Office be asked to raise the matter as diplomatically as possible with a view to regularising the practice.[34] The reply, six months later, was all that could have been hoped for. Healy advised Lord Devonshire, the Colonial Secretary, that British forces could continue to import tobacco, wine, and spirits duty-free, under a set of conditions that bound the army and navy to accepting responsibility for ensuring that the practice was not abused, and to import the goods in cooperation with the Irish Free State customs.[35] Healy's letter specified that the concession would apply to all 'members of both the army and navy' and that 'British Army and Naval Authorities' would be the bodies responsible for administering the conditions. However, a draft handwritten letter by J.H. Thomas dated March 1924, in which the terms were accepted, includes the statement 'Any such concession would not of course apply to stores for the use of H.M.'s Military Forces stationed in the

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[32] Adm. R. Tupper, C-in-C, Coast of Ireland Command, 21 July 1919; Adm F. Sturdee, C-in-C, The Nore, 17 July 1919 (TNA, CO 739/19). I am grateful to Colm Gallagher, Assistant Secretary, Department of Finance, for encouraging me to search for sources relating to the practice of duty-free allowances.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Devonshire to Healy, 11 May 1923 (TNA, CO 739/19).
[35] Healy to Devonshire, 24 Dec. 1923 (TNA, CO 739/19).

I.F.S.[36] The draft was approved by Mark Antrobus and another in the Colonial office. It is not known if this draft was ever sent in a final letter form but it would appear that British troops on Irish Free State soil may not have enjoyed a concession that the Irish government was happy for them to have.

No specific arrangement seems to have been made about British troops travelling in the Irish Free State in uniform, and armed, but this was the practice for at least the first couple of years. The matter first arose in April 1924 with a request for the GOC Northern Ireland District to travel occasionally through Irish Free State territory to visit the Lough Swilly forts, in uniform and with his regular escort.[37] The government replied that it had no objection to him travelling in uniform with an escort, but the escort could not be armed. This, of course, did not satisfy the army who insisted that their commanding officer could not be expected to travel in the Irish Free State without having proper protection. The government reply to J.H. Thomas, who was Secretary of State for the Colonies, was that it would be happy to provide an armed escort of Irish Free State troops to ensure his safety.[38] This was too much for the army's sensibilities – it could not permit its commanding officer to travel without the protection of his own men, so the offer was declined because 'its acceptance would constitute a departure from the traditions of the British army' and asked Healy to have the matter reconsidered.[39] After consulting with Dublin, Healy advised Thomas that the Executive Council regretted that the British felt unable to accept the offer to provide protection, and so it had 'come to the conclusion that the passage of British troops through Irish Free State territory is undesirable and might be the cause of embarrassment to both governments'.[40] This, however, did not mean the end of the practice of armed British troops in uniforms travelling in the Irish Free State, as will be discussed later. It must be presumed, though, that future visits by the GOC Northern Ireland District were made by sea because it could have caused a diplomatic incident if he had travelled in the state contrary to the specific ruling that the Executive Council had made regarding him; and it

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[36] J.H. Thomas, draft letter to Healy, Mar. 1924 (TNA, CO 739/26).
[37] Thomas to Healy, 8 Apr. 1924 (DFA 34/116); (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[38] Dept. of External Affairs to Sec. of State for Colonies, 23 Apr. 1924 (NAI, DFA 34/116); T.M. Healy to Thomas 25 Apr. 1924 (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[39] Thomas to Healy, 19 May 1924 (NAI, DFA 34/116); (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[40] Healy to Thomas 16 July 1924 (NAI, DFA 34/116.

would have been too much of an indignity for any commanding officer to have to travel in civilian clothes, practically incognito, in order to visit troops under his command. Even travelling by sea, however, would not have overcome the problem because the forts at Dunree and Lenan could not be directly accessed by sea. The government's decision did not take account of the practicalities of the British army operating under the new regime, but in the heightened tensions that existed in the country it would be unrealistic to expect it to have come to any other decision, especially as the incident was just part of a wider issue about British armed escorts in Irish Free State territory.

In a similar situation, the British army foresaw that it was going to have a problem in acquiring cash with which to pay soldiers in Cobh and Berehaven after 31 March 1923. It had been normal practice for cash to be sent under armed guard from Fishguard to Haulbowline by the City of Cork Steam Packet company's regular passage, transferred to a War Department launch and then distributed to where it was needed.[41] The army realised that this could not continue once Haulbowline was handed over to the Irish Free State at the end of the month. Drawing cash from a bank in Cobh was a possibility but it was not favoured by the army because the War Office declared that army personnel had been fired on in the past and it was feared that this could happen again.[42] The War Office did not say where or when this happened, and as there were no reported shootings against troops drawing money from the bank in Cobh, it is likely that the War Office was referring to one incident in Castletownbere on 25 August 1922.

Despite this, there remained the difficulty that all army transportation of cash had to be accompanied by an armed guard, and the War Office considered it to be 'undesirable for British armed soldiers to march through Queenstown in the present condition'.[43] The Admiralty initially turned down a request from the War Office to be of help in transporting regular supplies of cash to the forts on the south coast, but was eventually persuaded to agree to an army officer being given passage periodically between Cobh and Devonport,

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[41] War Office to Admiralty, 6 Mar. 1923 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).
[42] Ibid. (The War Office did not specify how troops should respond if they were fired at while proceeding to or from a bank).
[43] War Office to Admiralty, 23 Mar. 1923 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).

and between Cobh and Berehaven.[44] These difficulties were resolved with time and by 1936 it was recorded by the Gardaí that it was normal practice for six uniformed British Army officers to arrive at Cobh from Spike Island at 9.25 every Friday morning to collect cash from the bank to pay the troops. They usually returned at 10.15am but occasionally some of them took a detour to the Royal Cork Yacht Club, [45] presumably for refreshments.

The problem of having cash to pay the troops was particularly acute during the Civil War. The commander of HMS *Dunedin* reported that he brought £5000 to Queenstown because the local Bank of Ireland branch did not like keeping much money 'on account of gunmen raiding the Bank'. This had presented a difficulty for the Royal Navy in Haulbowline because they were not always able to draw enough cash from the bank to pay the dockyard workers.[46] There is also an account of a military party going to the bank in Castletownbere on 25 August 1922 to cash a cheque for £400 to pay the men on the island.[47] The party, which consisted of two officers in plain clothes and an armed guard of an officer and eight men. A number of wives and other women also made the trip to do some shopping. The soldiers were confronted by armed republicans as they were leaving the bank who demanded that the money be handed over. The officer who was carrying the cash refused and managed to escape with another subaltern but was wounded in the shoulder by gunfire in the process. As the whole party was boarding the motor launch to return to Bere Island they were again attacked by gunfire from the surrounding houses and one soldier was wounded in the leg, requiring him to be admitted to hospital. It was reported that the launch was subjected to continuous heavy fire as it left and the skipper was wounded in his arm.[48] Captain Hugh Somerville, the SNO, in his account of the incident, states that two officers in plainclothes, accompanied by an armed guard, were drawing cash, and that the officer carrying the cash was wounded. The other officer returned fire and wounded one of the assailants.[49] The officer in charge of the

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[44] 'Orders for destroyers in Irish waters', 11 Apr. 1923 (TNA, ADM 1/8652/253).
[45] Ass Commissioner D. MacCoillte to Dept of Defence, 3 Nov. 1936 (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[46] Commander [signature indecipherable] HMS *Dunedin*, 20 June 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8632/173).
[47] Cdr. R.V. Holt, to Rear Admiral, Destroyers, 11 Sept. 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8632/173).
[48] Ibid.
[49] Somerville to Admiralty, 13 Aug. 1922 (TNA, ADM 178/159)

party, Lt. E.M. Lindsay, was subsequently awarded the MBE in recognition of his actions.[50]

Nevertheless, despite the new arrangements with the navy they did not completely solve the problem, as there appears to have been an ongoing concern in the army about the transportation of cash because as late as April 1933, Lt-Cmdr. J. Younghusband of HMS *Thanet*, reported that when the 'OC Troops in Southern Ireland' travelled to Bere Island on a tour of inspection it was hoped that he would bring cash to pay the troops. He did not do so because it was considered to be too dangerous.[51] An officer who had brought cash previously was warned by a local inhabitant that he was lucky not to have been held up because a leakage of information had occurred and his actions had become known.[52] One consequence of the security measures that were adopted for the safeguarding of cash was that the soldiers were not always paid on time. This must have been a frequent enough occurrence because Younghusband, in a later despatch and in response to prompting from the military in Berehaven, urged on the Admiralty the importance of regular shipping of cash every fortnight.[53]

While the War Office may have had security concerns from an early date, the Admiralty does not appear to have expected such problems because a new set of standing orders for British destroyers in Irish waters that had come into effect less than two weeks earlier, on 31 March 1923, included instructions to ship commanders on how to deal with cash transactions. These specified that if a commander needed to draw cash by cheque he was to use the Bank of Ireland in Cobh, and to give notice to the manager of his requirements. There was no stipulation about wearing uniform or having an armed escort. One of the requirements was that the officer should endeavour to get treasury notes because a charge was made for Irish notes in England. This raised the bizarre possibility of a naval officer giving safe passage on his ship to an army officer travelling with cash to Cobh while the naval officer could simply draw cash from a bank in Cobh.

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[50] Historical records "V" coast battery, 49th Coy. RGA, 13 Aug. 1923 (RAM).
[51] Lt-Cdr. Younghusband, HMS *Thanet* confidential diary, 24 Apr. 1933 (TNA, ADM 116/2957).
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., 1 May 1933 (TNA, ADM 116/2957).

For the garrison in Lough Swilly, it was normal practice for cash to be delivered to Dunree, also for paying the soldiers, and these deliveries were invariably made under an armed escort. Every Friday, an officer from Forts Lenan and Dunree travelled by tender to the Royal Bank of Ireland in Buncrana to draw cash to pay the men. Each officer was armed and was escorted by a sergeant and three or four men, also armed. Also, when ammunition had to be transported to or from Derry, the lorry was manned by an escort of about six armed soldiers.[54] Chief Supt. P.J. Carroll had drawn the Commissioner, Eoin O'Duffy's, attention to the fact that this continued to happen after the passing of the Firearms' Act 1925.[55] The matter had been discussed with the Colonial Office in 1924 during negotiations about the GOC Northern Ireland travelling in the Irish Free State during which T.M. Healy had made it known that the practice was 'undesirable',[56] but no final decision was arrived at.

In an attempt to resolve the problem, a meeting was held in Buncrana on 9 April 1924 between Col. R.McDonnell and Col. Mitchell of the RGA and Irish Army officers at which it was agreed that:

> (1) that the fully armed British escorts travelling within the twenty-six counties be withdrawn. (2) that escorts necessary for the safe conveyance of cash from the bank at Buncrana to Dunree fort be supplied from our troops... an expression of my opinion that the continuance of such escorts was undesirable and would afford the 'Irregulars' additional and harmful propaganda.[57]

However, this agreement seems to have been ignored by the British Army because, three months later, O'Duffy complained to Cosgrave that the army

> have never carried out this agreement stating that it would be contrary to the traditions of their army to permit any portion of it to be escorted by another army. The consequence is that British escort parties continue to travel between Londonderry and Buncrana to the forts.[58]

It would appear, therefore, that the practice continued unabated, at least until customs officers raised the matter once again, in February 1926, of

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[54] Asst. Commissioner D. MacCoillte to Dept of Defence, 3 Nov. 1936 (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[55] A/Chief Supt. P.J. Carroll to Commissioner, 28 Dec. 1925 (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[56] Healy to Thomas, Colonial Office, 16 July 1924 (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[57] O'Duffy to Cosgrave 6 July 1924 (NAI, DFA 34/116).
[58] Ibid.

armed soldiers escorting lorries across the border.[59] They were prompted in this action by the introduction of the Firearms Act of 1925 under which it was forbidden to import arms without a licence. The Department of Justice then drew the attention of External Affairs to the matter, but despite it being circulated among a number of departments no positive action seems to have been taken.[60] In fact, External Affairs simply wrote a non-committal letter to the Dominions Office informing them that agreements with regard to licences for travel in the Irish Free State did not make reference to soldiers being armed.[61]

As late as November 1936, it was known by the Gardaí that British soldiers occasionally travelled outside the confines of their forts while armed and in uniform. Customs Officers also knew, and the Revenue Commissioners informed the Minister for Finance that they were aware that armed British troops were still acting as escorts but that customs officers were not taking action against the practice, and asked if the minister agreed.[62]

Despite these agreements, it seems that no firm direction was given to the Gardaí or customs officers about how they should deal with armed British soldiers, because, at least on one occasion, the Gardaí did not know what was expected of them. This happened in 1936 when Gunner Stanley Duguid of the South Irish Coastal Defence was buried in Ballinakilla graveyard on Bere Island on 13 April with full military honours.[63] The graveyard was not within what was referred to as the 'red line' areas of the island – the two areas at the east and west ends of the island in which the batteries were located – it was roughly in the centre of the island, several miles from each 'red line' area. About sixty soldiers from the garrison at the east end paraded with rifles. At the graveside a party of fourteen men fired a volley over the coffin and after the ceremony the whole party marched back to their base. The local Gardaí were aware of the event and reported on it, but while Superintendent T. Donovan recognised that the soldiers had a right of passage between their two bases, he commented that 'it *appears* (italics added) that they have a right to

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[59] Dept. of Justice to Dept. of External Affairs, 10 Feb. 1926 (DFA 21/355); (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[60] T.A. Finlay, Dept. of Justice to Dept. of External Affairs, 12 Feb. 1926 (DFA 21/355).
[61] Dept. of External Affairs to Dominions Office, 12 July 1926 (DFA 21/355).
[62] T. Cleary, Revenue Commrs. to Dept. of Defence, 6 Oct. 1925 (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[63] Supt. T. Donovan to Chief Supt., Cork, 4 May 1936 (NAI, JUS 8/441)

carry arms when marching from the east to the west, and vice versa.'[64] This would indicate that it was normal practice for soldiers to be armed when escorting vehicles on the island, and that the Gardaí were familiar with the practice. Donovan also expressed the view that 'the provision of a firing party has not created any opposition or scare among the inhabitants of the island.'[65] In fact the inhabitants would have been well used to the sound of gunfire by both the army and the navy, as there was a rifle range on the island that was used by both, and the navy used the bay for naval gunnery practice. However, volleys being fired over graves at funerals by uniformed firing parties was a core element in republican ceremonial, so Donovan's comment suggests an easier acceptance of British army practice than might otherwise have been expected in such a strongly republican area as west Cork.

There was an earlier report of officers and men parading at another funeral on Irish Free State territory, this time at the funeral of a Captain Fowler of the 17th Lancers, between 19 and 22 June 1925, but the event was simply noted and no further action was taken.[66] In fact, it was an offence under Treasonable Offences Act 1925 for anyone to drill in the Irish Free State without authority, and special permission had to be sought from the Dept. of Justice for military funerals. Following the implementation of the act, the Admiralty issued appropriate orders for ships visiting the ports.[67]

While the British Army might ignore directions on small arms, it could not do so with large guns. Consequently, when the army wanted to transport four 4-inch howitzer guns to the batteries at Dunree and Lenan it made a formal request to the Irish Free State government to do so in June 1924. Neither of these batteries were directly accessible by sea; the guns could only be delivered by sea as far as Buncrana or Derry. From Buncrana they would have to be transported by road for distances of seven and eleven miles respectively, while the journey from Derry was about forty miles.[68] External Affairs put off replying to the request for three months and then it asked for

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[64] Ibid.; Asst. Commissioner to Sec. Dept. of Justice, 3 Nov. 1936 (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[65] Ibid.
[66] Memorandum on file, July 1926 (NAI, DFA GR 524).
[67] Admiralty to C-in-C, Devonport, 14 Apr. 1926 (TNA, ADM 178/161).
[68] War Office to L. Curtis, Colonial Office, 28 June 1924 (NAI, DFA 34/116).

the request to be held off for another few months.[69] The Colonial Office held off until February 1925 when it initiated a series of letters, classified as 'secret', with External Affairs.[70] Permission was eventually given but with the proviso that the guns be shipped to Buncrana and the army planned for this to be done in June.[71] No direct mention was made by either party about escorts, armed or otherwise, although Geoffrey Whiskard of the Colonial Office promised to give advance notice of the dates of transport so that the 'relevant authorities could be advised'.[72] The operation was carried out without hindrance.

These difficulties occurred at a time when the Irish Free State government was still having problems with its own army, so the sight of armed British troops travelling in uniform in the country could easily have been a cause of aggravation for republicans in the army. This is reflected in the government's earlier refusal to allow the GOC Northern Ireland District to travel with his own armed escort through the Irish Free State en route to Dunree. Only a few weeks earlier, the Minister for Defence and the army GOC had been forced to resign and the Army Council had been dismissed following a mutiny within the army. Why the British made their request at this time is a matter of speculation but it is not unreasonable to assume that it would have been over a genuine concern for the safety of its commanding officer while being escorted by an Irish army that was in some disarray. Their concern would also have been fuelled by the attempted massacre of British soldiers and civilians as they disembarked from a boat at Cobh on 21 March by attackers in the uniforms of National Army officers.[73]

However, routine in the forts continued, and when another heavy gun had to be transported in 1926 the Department of External Affairs was consulted. This time it was for a 12-pounder and its mounting to go to Dunree, and for it to be transported by road because of difficulties that had been experienced in unloading the four howitzers the previous year.[74] There

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[69] D. O'Hegarty, Dept. of External Affairs to G. Whiskard, Colonial Office, 3 Sept. 1924 (NAI, DFA 34/116).
[70] Whiskard to O'Hegarty, 12 Feb. 1925 (NAI, DFA 34/116).
[71] Ibid., 1 May 1925.
[72] Ibid., 8 June 1925.
[73] Court of Inquiry Proceedings, 24 Mar 1924 (TNA, WO 32/4851). This incident is covered in chapter 5.
[74] Whiskard to O'Hegarty, 9 Jan. 1926 (NAI, DFA 34/116).

was no procrastination by External Affairs to this request and they granted permission almost immediately.[75]

Five years elapsed before another request was received for permission to transport heavy guns, and this time it was for a double journey. The army wanted to ship two howitzers to Belfast for overhauling and return to Dunree, and their plan was to do this through Derry.[76] External Affairs granted permission in Aug 1931 but not before consulting the president and the departments of Justice and Defence. The permission was granted with just one stipulation that 'as ample notice as possible of the date of removal' be given – in order that the Gardaí be advised and be aware of the activity.[77] External Affairs heard nothing more of the matter until they received a letter from C.W. Dixon, Dominions Office, on 27 November apologising for the fact that the guns had already been removed some time before and that, because of a 'slip-up' the Irish Free State had not been notified.[78] The problem now, of course, was getting the guns back, so Dixon expressed the hope that 'there would be no objection to the guns being returned.'[79] External Affairs clearly empathised with their colleagues in the Dominions Office for Walshe replied 'we quite understand how a "slip-up" of the kind could occur.'[80] Nevertheless, neither the Gardaí, the Irish army, nor anyone in authority was aware that two heavy artillery guns had been transported under armed escort by the British army from Dunree to Derry.

One of the matters that needed to be addressed by the War Office when the treaty was ratified was the legal status of British soldiers in the new Irish Free State. This was raised initially by the army Judge Advocate General (JAG) who expressed concern for soldiers who would be in Ireland after the new state came into being. His opinion was that legislation would have to be passed by the new Provisional Government so that no proceedings in criminal courts could be taken against soldiers on duty in the Irish Free State.[81]

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[75] O'Hegarty to Whiskard, 13 Jan. 1926 (NAI, DFA 34/116).
[76] J.H. Thomas, Dominions Office to J.P. Walshe, External Affairs, 21 July 1931 (NAI, DFA 34/116).
[77] Dept. of External Affairs to Dominions Office, 26 Aug. 1931 (NAI, DFA 34/116).
[78] C.W. Dixon, Dominions Office to Sec., J.P. Walshe, External Affairs, 27 Nov. 1931 (NAI, DFA 34/116).
[79] Ibid.
[80] Walshe to Dixon, Dec. 1931 (NAI, DFA 34/116).
[81] Memorandum by Gilbert Mellor, JAG office, 7 Nov. 1922 (TNA WO 32/5307).

General Nevil Macready, GOC in Ireland, took up the matter strongly on behalf of his men. His main argument was that from the moment the new state came into existence, the legal position of all his men would become impossible if they could be brought before the Irish courts, especially as some of the newly-appointed judges were men who had been dealt with and interned by the military in pre-truce days.[82] All military personnel were subject to the Army Act for disciplinary matters and they operated under the provisions of the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act 1920 (ROI Act). This act was introduced following the collapse of British administration during the War of Independence and it allowed the military to deal with IRA activity without having to declare martial law in the country, and by replacing trial by jury with court martial. Under this act 'any person who is alleged to have committed any offence...while he was subject to military law shall, unless the competent military authority otherwise directs...be liable to be tried for any offence by court martial and not otherwise...'[83]

The Army Council and the JAG expected that the Provisional Government would immediately suspend the act, thus leaving British soldiers exposed. The only solution they could see was to ask the Provisional Government to introduce an indemnity bill as soon as it took office.[84] However, the Technical Committee, under Sir Frederick Liddell, set up to deal with this matter recognised that there was not the slightest hope of this happening and advised that 'the Provisional Government are more likely to repeal them if we put the idea into their minds than if we say nothing.'[85] It was also argued that the act would automatically lapse once the new state came into being. In the end it was decided that there was no legal solution to the problem and that the Provisional Government would have to be approached in the hope that there would be understanding in the matter. Mark Sturgis, in the Colonial Office, took up this suggestion and asked N.G. Loughnane, the Colonial Office representative on the staff of the governor general in Dublin, to convey these sentiments to W.T. Cosgrave. He was asked to explain to

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[82] Personal notes by Macready, 21 Nov. 1922 (TNA, CO 739/11). Report on legal position of troops in Ireland by Macready, n.d., ibid.
[83] Extract from 'Restoration of Order in Ireland Act 1920', Cmd. 2278 (www.parlipapers.chadwyck.co.uk) (Oct. 2009).
[84] Attorney General minute to War Office, 9 Nov. 1922 (TNA, WO 32/5307).
[85] B. Draper, War Office minute, 15 Nov. 1922 (TNA, WO 32/5307).

Cosgrave that while the British government recognised that the troops would be 'amenable to the jurisdiction of the civil courts and there is no obstacle to prevent any officer or soldier of ours from being charged before a Free State court on any accusation by the police or private individuals', he was also to point out that under British military law provision was made for the trial of soldiers charged with offences against the civil law by military courts.[86] By this time it was realised by all that while this legal difficulty related to the bulk of troops who were still in Ireland and awaiting orders to leave, there was also the longer term consideration of the troops who would be manning the defences of the treaty ports on a 'care and maintenance' basis.

There had been disquiet in both the War Office and the Colonial Office about this matter because it was a dilemma that had the potential for serious consequences if a satisfactory solution could not be found – and the civil servants were unable to find one. Consequently, the decision of the Provisional Government, when it was conveyed to the Colonial Office, must have brought considerable relief, because it was generous. Loughnane's letter to Sturgis stated that Cosgrave and Mulcahy

> 'agreed that wherever possible, British military offenders against the civil law would be handed over to their own military authorities for trial and punishment, and that in cases where this course was impractical the British civil or military authorities would be consulted when such arrests were made'[87].

Loughnane added that there would be no assurances in writing and that Cosgrave and Mulcahy felt that the matter was to be considered as 'an amicable informal agreement by both sides to avoid occasions of embarrassment'.[88] He also added that they felt that a similar procedure should be adopted 'in the same friendly spirit by the Northern Government in the event of arrest of Free State soldiers in the Six-County area'.[89]

While all of this was going on, it seems that no one had consulted the Admiralty or even kept them officially informed of what was happening. They did learn of the matter, though, through their own sources, because the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty wrote to the Colonial Office on 8 December,

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[86] Sturgis to Loughnane, 28 Nov. 1922, ibid.
[87] Loughnane to Sturgis, 5 Dec. 1922, ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.

referring to the ROI Act, presuming that it would remain in force until it was specifically repealed, and asked that the Irish Free State government be informed of the effect this could have on the navy when this happened.[90]

Off-duty troops were allowed to socialise outside the immediate forts' areas but they had to stay within limits specified by their commanding officer that were not far from the forts. These areas were advised to the officer commanding the local Irish Free State National Army and to An Garda Síochána. In Queenstown, for instance, troops were allowed to stay within the bounds shown on a local map, between 6.30 pm and 10.30 pm.[91] It had been the practice at Bere Island that troops who socialised in Berehaven and got drunk were dealt with by British military police. An informal practice was agreed between the relevant officers commanding the local Irish and British troops that any British soldier who was found to be drunk or absent after the boat had left for Bere Island would be arrested by the local Irish troops 'for his own protection' and a wireless message would be sent to Bere Island for an escort to come and collect him.[92] As soon as he heard about the practice General Peadar MacMahon issued an order forbidding it.[93]

When the Irish Free State came into being, the tenancy and leasehold agreements under which the War Office, Admiralty, and other government departments had held land or property continued as before. There was no question of the British government's legal rights over property being overturned; to have done so would have caused legal chaos. When a naval or military property was to be vacated, the two governments reached an agreement on how to dispose of the property. In most cases, the new government took over ownership after agreeing a value. The Admiralty retained some coastguard stations and war signal stations but most were taken over by the Irish Free State. A great deal of damage was done to these stations throughout the country during the War of Independence and the Irish

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[90] Admiralty to Colonial Office, 8 Dec. 1922, ibid.
[91] Capt. F.W. Rauntlett, SICD to O/c 59th Infantry Batt., Irish Free State Army, 15 Apr. 1924 (MA, CDA/78).
[92] GOC, Southern Command to Gen. P. MacMahon, 7 Oct. 1924 (MA, CDA/78).
[93] Gen. P. MacMahon to GOC, Southern Command, 18 Jan. 1925 (MA, CDA/78).

government was obliged to pay considerable compensation to the British government.[94]

Land that had been occupied by the army or navy was either owned by a British government department or it was leased from a local landowner. During the years following independence there were a number of instances where there were problems in establishing title to land that was vacated because of difficulties in getting hold of original documents in Britain, and where land or property had been transferred from one government department to another.[95] One of the more difficult cases to resolve concerned Haulbowline Island. Even the Cork Harbour Commissioners were unable to determine their own responsibilities as late as 1932 in relation to the land on Haulbowline that fell outside the boundaries of the naval dockyard, because they were unable to establish legal title to it. It took eight years before the matter was settled.[96]

During the 1920s and early 1930s there were ongoing problems with tenants and squatters on military land who refused to pay rent. Most of these problems were centred on various types of tenancies on what was described as 'clearance land' on Bere Island. This was land that was held for the purpose of giving a clear field of fire in front of the batteries.[97] By 1928, twenty of the eighty-five tenants were between one and seven years in arrears with rent, while another ten were up to one year in arrears, and they simply refused to pay what was due to the local army commander. The army was not overly concerned with the money: it was bothered because 'the rent defaulters treat them with derision and show their open defiance by grazing their cattle etc. on lands exclusively reserved for the military.' One tenant on Bere Island, a John Sullivan, was a particular problem. On being refused work by Capt. S.E. Fleming, R.A. he started a campaign of abusing troops whenever he came in contact with them, refused to pay rent and persisted in driving his cattle

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[94] Admiralty naval law branch to H.M. Treasury, 11 Sept. 1924 (TNA, ADM 116/2146); 'Statement of ex-Admiralty property transferred to the IFS', July 1923, (NAI ,FIN 1/1832).

[95] Office of Public Works to Dept. External Affairs, 12 Feb. 1936; Dept. of Defence to Dept. External Affairs, 20 Apr. 1943; High Commissioner to Dept. External Affairs 31 May 1943, 26 Mar. 1947 (NAI, DFA 305/4).

[96] Cork Harbour Commissioners to Commissioners of Public Works, 19 Aug. 1932; M.E. Antrobus to F.H. Boland, 1 July 1940 (NAI, DFA 305/4).

[97] J.P. Walshe, minute 25 Feb. 1928(NAI, DFA file 32/50); Joseph O'Connell, Army Finance Office, report on Bere Island, Aug. 1928 (NAI, DFA file 32/50).

across military land.[98] Despite all efforts to resolve the problem, no solution was found. Capt. Fleming was informed that it was something that would have to be dealt with by Civic Guards who, in turn, said that it was a civil matter to be dealt with by the courts.[99]

During and after the War of Independence it became common practice for the tenants to withhold rent to landlords generally, but when the Irish Free State became established the landlords were able to pursue the defaulters through the courts. The War Office was very reluctant to go down this route, knowing the local reaction that could result from it. But the War Office had a bigger reason: there was considerable doubt over whether it held title to the land it occupied, and whether this was vested in the Irish Free State. Joseph O'Connell, of the Army Finance Office, examined this matter in detail. He was appointed to carry out a full investigation of all matters relating to the problems of non-payment of rent and to suggest how they might be resolved. His endeavours resulted in a most comprehensive report on the situation on Bere Island and at Lough Swilly. It gives an in-depth analysis of the legal title to the lands; the tenants' rights, and lack of them; the social and political considerations; and it offers solutions to the problems.[100]

As a general rule, all lands occupied by the British military were vested in the Secretary of State for War, but in the case of occupied land in the colonies, the fee simple was vested in the Crown as represented by the colonial government, and the War Department simply had a right to use the land for defensive purposes for as long as necessary.[101] O'Connell's advice to the Executive Council was that there was, therefore, no valid reason why the British government should not concede ownership of Bere Island lands to the Irish Free State, which would then grant permission to the War Department to use them under the same terms.

Berehaven was constituted a dockyard port in 1907 by an Order-in-Council, on the same constitutional basis as Haulbowline, even though it was not a dockyard in the same sense.[102] O'Connell referred to the particular

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[98] Capt. S.E. Fleming to O/C Troops, Bere Island, 24 Aug. 1924 (MA, CDA/78).
[99] Adjutant, Southern Command to O/C SICD, Spike Island, 3 Nov. 1925 (MA, CDA/78).
[100] O'Connell, Army Finance Office, report on Bere Island, Aug. 1928 (NAI, DFA 32/50).
[101] Ibid.
[102] Admiralty to Dominions Office, 6 Sept. 1939 (TNA, ADM 1/10531).

Order in Council that defined the limits of the port and he concluded that 'the term "Dockyard Port of Berehaven" [as defined in the annex to the treaty] does not denote any property but simply a right to use as a dockyard port the waters bays and creeks...' of the bay. All properties used by the Admiralty on Bere Island were situated on War Department land and were legally termed as encroachments. Admiralty property on the mainland, in 1928, comprised three piers, two of which were practically unusable, and a reservoir, a signal station, two oil tanks, a couple of cottages, and seventy to eighty acres of land—none of which were being used. Furthermore, by 1928 the army was occupying only the fort on the east end of Bere Island; the west end forts were out of commission. The War Office still retained a number of rights of way that it had purchased in 1907 to ensure they had access to the various properties on the island. However, the Attorney General, John O'Byrne, had advised in 1925 that

> the Annex to the Treaty must be read in conjunction with Articles 6 and 7 of the Treaty. In this way it will seem that the Admiralty were allowed to retain this property for the purpose of defence and in my opinion they are only entitled to retain it for so long as it is required for this purpose. If and when any portion of the property becomes unnecessary for the purpose of defence the Saorstat should thereupon claim to be entitled to any such property.[103]

Acting on this advice, the Office of Public Works assumed ownership of the coastguard station in Castletownbere, although in this instance they had already been advised by the Admiralty that the property was no longer needed and they wished to dispose of it.[104] The Attorney General in 1928, who was John A. Costello, further advised that, 'the land of Bere Island belongs to the Saorstat and that the British are mere licensees.'[105]

Actually, the transaction of this coastguard station had even more significance. In 1926, the Department of Local Government and Public Health wanted to set up a fever hospital at Castletownbere because 'the Castletownbere peninsula is a fever district in which various forms of infectious disease, and particularly typhoid, are a frequent occurrence.'[106] An

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[103] Attorney General, 8 Sept. 1925, cited in O'Connell report (NAI, DFA file 32/50).
[104] S. Phillips, Military Intelligence, report 27 July 1933 (TNA, ADM 1/8787).
[105] Attorney General, 25 Feb. 1928, cited in O'Connell report (NAI, DFA 32/50).
[106] Dept. of Local Government and Public Health to OPW, 14 Dec. 1926 (NAI, DFA GR/896).

old workhouse nearby would have served but it was occupied by the military, so it was felt that the vacated grounds of the coastguard station would be suitable. When the Admiralty was approached by the OPW they indicated that they would be willing to lease the property on a long-term lease but would much prefer to sell it outright because they had no need for it.[107] However, the Attorney General got involved and his advice was that the Admiralty was only entitled to retain the property for as long as it was being used for defensive purposes. If it ceased to be used thus, the state should claim that it was automatically entitled to the property.[108] This advice was acted upon. The OPW took up the matter with the Admiralty who released the property to the state.

The War Office had already realised that there was doubt about its title to Bere Island land. In 1926, the Chiefs of Staff recommended that the three ports on the western end of the island (Reenduff, Derrycreevin, Ardnakinna) be evacuated because they had become obsolete, and for the three forts on the eastern end to be reduced in size but to be upgraded. These recommendations were made on the understanding that they would be able to re-establish the abandoned defences if it became necessary.[109] However, when this report was being considered at a meeting of the CID the following month, Leo Amery, the Colonial Secretary, argued that under the annex to the treaty, if the army withdrew from any of the forts there would be difficulty in re-occupying them at a later date because it would be necessary to obtain permission from the Irish Free State government.[110] Interestingly, the Secretary of State for War, Laming Worthington-Evans, voiced a prescient view on the matter, one that the War Office would later adopt in inter-departmental debates about returning the ports in the late 1930s: 'if the Irish Free State were friendly when we wished to re-occupy the west end of Bere Island no difficulty would arise. If on the other hand they were unfriendly, the place would be untenable.'[111] Amery later put his views to Worthington-Evans in writing and suggested the matter be put on the agenda for the forthcoming meeting in

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[107] Civil Engineer-in-Chief, Admiralty, to OPW, 21 Feb. 1927 (NAI, DFA GR/896).
[108] Attorney General to State Solicitor, 17 Feb. 1928 (NAI, DFA files, GR/896).
[109] Minutes of COS meeting, 22 June 1926 (TNA, DO 117/18).
[110] Minutes of CID meeting, 29 July 1926 (TNA, DO 117/18).
[111] Ibid.

December with representatives of the Irish Free State. Nothing came of this and the army vacated the west end forts.

The opinion of the Crown law officers was sought and this did not bring any succour to the Admiralty or the War Office. In their reply, the officers referred to Article 11 of the Irish constitution that states:

> All the lands and waters, mines and minerals, within the territory of the Irish Free State hitherto vested in the State, or any department thereof...shall, from and after the date of the coming into operation of this constitution, belong to the Irish Free State[112]

and from this they concluded that 'in our opinion the lands vested in the Secretary of State...and lands occupied by him under emergency powers have been transferred to the Free State government'.[113] Their advice to the Admiralty and War Office was to keep quiet about the matter, not to allow it to be discussed in parliament, and, unless the matter came to court, to 'let sleeping dogs lie.'[114] They also concluded that while the Admiralty's rights relating to the 'port of Berehaven' were preserved:

> in the case of the harbour defences the only rights preserved appear to be rights to remain in charge, and with regard to these localities the estate in the lands affected would appear to have passed to the Irish Free State.[115]

While the law officers placed weight on Article 11 of the constitution it would appear that they did not attach significance to the clause in the preamble to the constitution that stated:

> The said Constitution shall be construed with reference to the Articles of Agreement for a Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland...and if any provision of the said Constitution or of any amendment thereof or of any law made thereunder is in any respect repugnant to any of the provisions of the Scheduled Treaty, it shall, to the extent only of such repugnancy, be absolutely void and inoperative.[116]

S. Phillips, in Military Intelligence, had argued that this clause gave the treaty primacy over the constitution in matters of dispute, and that the Irish

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[112] The Constitution of the Irish Free State (Saorstát Éireann) Act, 1922 (www.ucc.ie/celt).
[113] D. McGarel-Hogg, T.W.H. Inskip, legal opinion, Sept. 1926 (TNA, ADM 1/8787).
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] The Constitution of the Irish Free State (Saorstát Eireann) Act, 1922. (www.ucc.ie/celt).

Free State's claim over land occupied by the War Office was invalid, but it seems that his advice was either overlooked or ignored.[117]

When de Valera raised the question of ownership of the land at Berehaven that was not being used for naval defence purposes in 1933 he adopted a more positive approach to it. He cited, as a precedent, the coastguard station at Castletownbere that had passed to the state because the Admiralty had no need for it, although this had been with Admiralty agreement. He also pointed out that the Chief Engineer-in-Charge at the Admiralty had requested the Office of Public Works to arrange for the sale of oil tanks and for the letting of a golf course on the seventy acres of land controlled by the Admiralty at Beale Lough. His point was that if this land was not needed for defence, its ownership passed to the Irish Free State.[118] Not unsurprisingly, this letter caused a deal of consternation in Whitehall.

Several meetings were held in Whitehall with a view to drawing up arguments refuting any possible claim to land held in Berehaven that the Irish Free State government might make. It was now recognised by most that they had a very weak case if strong claims were to be made by the Irish Free State, and they scrambled to find ways to overcome their problem. Vice Admiral Sir Eric Fullerton, C-in-C Plymouth, who had responsibility for Berehaven, was urged to consider ways for the Admiralty to use land at Berehaven, either for naval purposes or even for recreational purposes.[119] He passed the problem to Commander G. Wood, who was Senior Naval Officer in Irish Waters at the time, asking him to seek solutions. Wood reported that he found it difficult to find a valid use for land on Bere Island that would be strong enough to counter a possible claim by the Irish Free State government. Moreover, his opinion was that the seventy acres of land on the mainland were very poor and uneven, and to bring them to a state where cricket or football could be played would entail a large expenditure of money. His only positive suggestion was for a small quantity of fuel oil to be kept at Berehaven and to arrange for a destroyer to call there occasionally and take on some oil. His concluding statement was that 'it is difficult to see how a good case for its retention by

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[117] Military Intellgence, report 27 July 1933 (TNA, ADM 1/8787).
[118] De Valera to Dominions Office, 23 June 1933 (DO 117/18).
[119] Admiralty to C-in-C, Plymouth, 13 Sept. 1933 (TNA, ADM 1/8787).

their Lordships could be made out'.[120] However, their Lordships did not have to consider his one positive suggestion: it was ruled out before it got to them.

O'Connell's report on Berehaven must have impressed the Irish Free State government because he was asked to carry out the same exercise at Lough Swilly, and his conclusions were even more positive. His starting premise was that all land at Lough Swilly was already vested in the State and that the British were just licensees.[121]

The areas under military command were the forts at Dunree, Lenan, Rathmullen, Ned's Point, Inch, Macamish, and Knockalla. Of these, only the first two had been used for defence of the lough during the First World War and were still operational in 1928. The others had been used for accommodation for sailors and soldiers during the war while Rathmullen had been converted into an oil storage facility. After the war, the Admiralty had conceded that it had no need for Rathmullan, and its ownership had already passed to the Irish Free State. In fact the latter three forts had actually been decommissioned as forts in 1890.

It should be noted that the treaty does not define precisely what was meant by the term 'harbour defences' of any of the three ports, nor does it specify which forts actually comprised these defences, thus leaving a degree of ambiguity when abandoned military property had to be considered. O'Connell's report drew attention to the fact that the latter four forts in Lough Swilly were not being used for any military purpose when he inspected them, and he described them as being derelict and abandoned. This raised the question of what was meant by the statement in the treaty for 'harbour defences to remain in charge of British care and maintenance parties'. O'Connell's opinion was that only active harbour defences were meant to be included under this clause, because there was no sense in caring and maintaining defences that had become derelict and had been abandoned because there was no longer any military use for them. This being so, it strengthened the Attorney General's opinion earlier that year that any property not needed for defence purposes would automatically revert to the

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[120] Cdr. G.F. Wood to C-in-C, Plymouth, 6 Oct. 1933 (TNA, ADM 1/8787).
[121] Joseph O'Connell, Army Finance Office, report on Lough Swilly, 23 Oct. 1928 (NAI, DFA 32/50).

state. This point had been accepted within Whitehall but, of course, was not admitted outside its walls.

These two reports by Joseph O'Connell suggest that de Valera might have been even more trenchant in his pursuit of the return of the ports, especially if he had been aware of the concern in Whitehall over their rights to them. The Dominions Office strove to keep the Irish Free State government from learning of its concerns and it issued simple rebuttals and prevarications to de Valera's letters pressing his claim. An indication of the concern that existed in Whitehall can be gauged by how the Admiralty changed its mind about dismissing a civilian caretaker in Berehaven for fear that his dismissal would draw attention to the diminishing naval activity in the area.[122]

It should be emphasised that in all of its submissions about the land it occupied and its actions in reducing its activity there, the Admiralty never ceased to reiterate the importance of Berehaven to the defence of Britain in the event of war and of its need for access to it in time of war. Most of its actions in reducing its use of facilities at Berehaven were driven by financial imperatives rather than a changing belief that Berehaven was no longer of any strategic importance.

The final text of the Articles of Agreement for a treaty is a relatively concise document that lays out the provisions under which the new Irish Free State would exist. While the negotiators agreed precise terms for all matters of major importance it would not have been expected for the final document to have covered every eventuality that might occur once the treaty became operational. (Churchill may not have been referring directly to the matters discussed in this chapter when he wrote that the treaty negotiations were 'baffling through their vagueness and uncertainty' but they offer an explanation about why the negotiations were necessarily vague on some matters).[123] It was to be expected that any teething problems that arose would have been dealt with routinely through normal diplomatic channels, and the evidence indicates that this is what happened. The evidence also indicates that in the early years of the Irish Free State the government recognised that sensitivities existed on both sides in certain matters, such as wearing

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[122] Admiralty memorandum, 28 May 1935 (TNA, ADM 1/8787).
[123] Churchill, draft chapter for book 'The crisis years', undated (CCA, Char 8/240).

uniforms and carrying arms, and that while it took decisions that asserted its authority and the state's autonomy, it did not pursue those decisions regardless of the consequences. Once a problem was brought to its attention it was dealt with formally but was then allowed to work itself out pragmatically. This is an aspect of government that was manifest in the matter of official visits to Irish Free State ports by Royal Navy warships (see chapter 8). It is also clear that the Irish Free State government was willing to cooperate with the British military authorities by easing the practical difficulties they experienced while travelling through Irish Free State territory. Even on the issue of ownership of land in the ports' areas, where the government was on strong legal ground, it did not pursue its case to an extreme.

Seawards view of Admiralty House, Queenstown, the headquarters of the Royal Navy in Ireland until 1922. It was also the command centre of operations for Allied naval forces in the First World War. Burnt out by republican forces in 1923, but later rebuilt and is now a retreat house.

(Photo: Lawrence Collection by kind permission NLI)

View of Haulbowline Island , probably taken from Admiralty House gardens.

(Photo: Lawrence Collection by kind permission NLI)

Unloading supplies and furniture on Spike Island landing jetty 1929-30. Note the use of local privately-owned horse and cart to transport the goods to the fort.

(Photo: Meates family papers, by kind permission Herefordshire Archives Service)

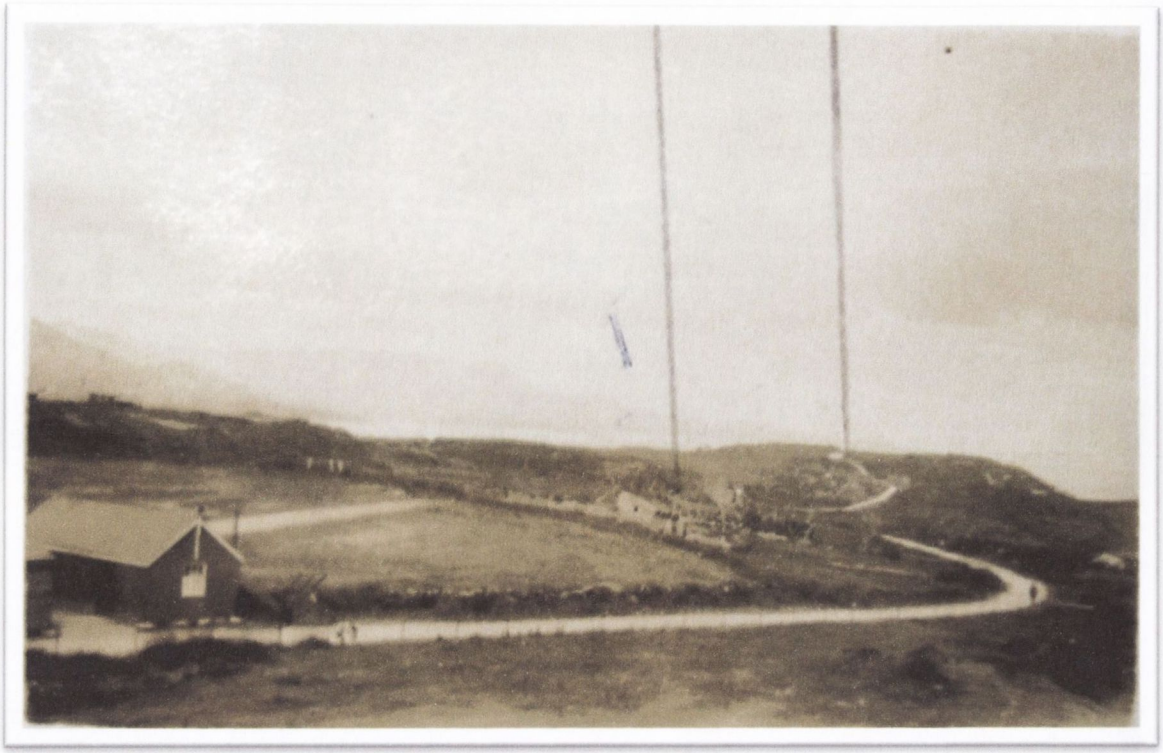
One of two 9.2-inch guns that were at Fort Templebreedy, Cork Harbour. Photo belonging to Lt. L.H.C. Meates RGA in 1929. Inscription on back of photo states: 'A 9.2 inch coast defence gun. You will see one at the sights. Beyond is Roches Point, and the entrance to Queens town Harbour is to the left. Off the point are the remains of the White Star Liner, 'Celtic.'

(Photo: Meates family papers, by kind permission Herefordshire Archives Service)

Admiralty recreation grounds, Castletownbere, 1880-1914
(photo: by kind permission National Library of Ireland)

Royal Navy sailors hiring saddle horses and jaunting cars in front of the Royal Naval Hotel, Castletownbere. Undated but probably early 20th century.

(Photo: Beara Historical Society)



Bere Island, looking north-east from Rerrin battery towards Lonehort battery in 1925. Note the exposed position of the officers' quarters in the centre of the photo.

(Photo: War Office file WO 32/5315)

Bere Island 1925, looking north from Rerrin battery. The shirtless(?) men at the bottom suggest that the building behind them housed the shower and toilet facilities.

(photo: War Office file WO 32/5315)

7 Proposed review of defence aspects of treaty: missed opportunities

While the terms of the treaty may have been non-specific about the working arrangements of British forces attached to the ports, there was no ambiguity over the clause in Article 6 of the treaty that required the agreement on coastal defence to be reviewed by the two governments after five years. The review was to be taken 'with a view to the undertaking by Ireland of a share in her own coastal defence'.[1]

For the first few years of independence the Irish government was pre-occupied with the immediate problems of administering a new state, and was more concerned with internal security than in developing a long-term international defence policy. Also, another European war was a remote possibility at this time, so the likelihood of being drawn into such a war because of British military bases on Irish territory was not a consideration in the government's short-term thinking.

In the absence of any initiative by the government to have plans drawn up for a defence policy appropriate to the country's longer-term needs, the army General Staff took the initiative in 1925. They drew up proposals for the development of a national defence policy that was largely based on a flexible, mobile army and a modest naval service.[2] The policy recognised that the defence forces could not be capable of mounting an effective defence against a modern well-equipped army, navy or air force, but the likelihood of the country becoming involved in war with another country was remote. The long-term problem was that the country's geographical location made it more likely for it 'to become a cockpit for the belligerents in a war between England and any other power.' The defence plan also recognised another longer-term danger in relying on Britain to provide the main defence against an aggressor or for the National Army to be too close an ally of Britain.[3] This plan was

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[1] Articles of agreement for a treaty between Great Britain and Ireland, 6 Dec. 1921 (NAI, DE 2/304/1).
[2] General Staff, 'Memorandum on defence policy', 22 July 1922 (MA, CDA/5, CDA 1/5).
[3] Ibid.

followed up by a second memorandum a year later with more specific recommendations.[4]

The plan was ignored because the government was more concerned about reducing expenditure, and more focussed on shrinking the size of the National Army. While financial constraints were a strong factor in the government's policy, it still decided to pursue a policy of recovering the Treaty Ports at the agreed review conference in 1926 and was willing to take on the significant financial burden of doing so.

Britain's military objectives in this period, as they affected Ireland, were the retention of the ports at all costs and the continued right to defend the seas around Ireland. There had been no weakening of its resolve to maintain control over what it saw as an essential element in its overall defence. The Committee on Imperial Defence continued to attach significance to the Treaty Ports and in a major review of imperial defences worldwide in 1928 Berehaven was highlighted as being of the highest importance as a naval base and that it justified being upgraded, even at considerable expenditure[5]

Defence planning in the 1920s was compromised by government differences on how matters should proceed. The Irish government's main focus was on reducing the numbers in the National Army and for the army's main function to be internal security, as a type of armed gendarmerie acting as a back-up to the Garda Síochána.

Mainly because of financial constraints, there was no interest at government level in developing an army or naval service capable of providing anything more than a nominal defence against an external aggressor. Despite this, the government was willing to take-over, upgrade, and operate the defences of the Treaty Ports. Britain, on the other hand, was insistent on remaining in control of the ports' defences but did want the Irish Free State to take part in the country's sea defence. This was the situation that obtained throughout the 1920s.

The new Irish government had many immediate problems that needed to be resolved, both administrative and financial, so the defence arrangements

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[4] Memorandum on the position in regard to the coastal defence of Ireland, 31 Mar. 1926 (MA, CDA/1, CDA 1/1).
[5] CID memorandum 'Imperial defence policy', July 1928 (TNA, CAB 24/198).

agreed under the treaty did not feature highly on any agenda. However, an Imperial Conference, in which defence featured strongly, was held in London in October 1923 and it was considered important enough for Cosgrave and a number of advisors to attend, including Gen. Richard Mulcahy, Lt-Gen. Sean MacMahon and Major Gen. J.J. O'Brien.[6] Cosgrave did not take an active part in any of the discussions and it can be presumed that he used the opportunity for establishing a relationship with the leaders of the other dominions.[7]

By mid-1923, the only British forces remaining in Ireland were the troops and specialists, numbering about 950 in total, who manned the treaty ports and the sailors on the Royal Navy destroyers patrolling in Irish waters. There was little discussion about these matters in the Dáil or at Westminster in the immediate post-independence years, nor was the topic of the ports of great interest to the newspapers. The Dáil had more pressing matters to deal with, as had the British government, having had four prime ministers and three new governments between October 1922 and November 1924. The British government's defence policies were seriously hampered by the consequences of the severe cuts in defence spending recommended by the Geddes committee that resulted in continuing reductions in the numbers of military and naval personnel.

The Irish government was also involved in reducing the size of its army and in dealing with the consequent unemployment of large numbers of men. By the end of the civil war in May 1923, the army numbered 3,000 officers and 52,000 other ranks, and one of the main reasons for the army mutiny in 1924 was the GHQ plan to reduce this number to 1,300 officers and 30,000 other ranks by the beginning of January 1924.[8] This was reduced further to a targeted level of 1,081 officers and 17,887 other ranks by the year 1924-25.[9] Even this level was too high but it was believed to be necessary to provide a backup to the 5,000-plus strong Garda Síochána because of a perceived threat from large numbers of so-called 'Irregulars' who were still considered to

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[6] Minutes of 10th meeting of Imperial Conference, 19 Oct. 1923 (TNA, CAB 24/164.)
[7] Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, 1 Oct. 1923, *ii*, p. 245.
[8] Maryann Valiulis, 'The army mutiny of 1924 and the assertion of civilian authority in independent Ireland', in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxiii, no. 92 (Nov. 1983), p. 358.
[9] Peter Hughes, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xi, col. 1559, 15 May 1925.

be a menace.[10] Reductions continued to be made in the following years and by April 1929 the army comprised 502 officers and 6,474 other ranks—the finally targeted figure for officers but still 1,500 short of the target for other ranks for that year.[11]

Throughout the 1920s there was continual debate over the role of the army in the changing political climate. It was typified by a contribution from Frank Kerlin, a Fianna Fáil member from Dublin South, who complained that the purpose of the army needed to be re-defined and that, as it stood, was inadequate as a defence against an outside power, but was equally unsuitable in its role as a reserve police force.[12] The main role of the army in the immediate post-treaty years was the preservation of order in the state, and acting as a back-up to the Garda Síochána in keeping the anti-treaty forces subdued. Kerlin's comment in 1929 illustrated how the function of the army was still not fully defined. Even though Ireland was an island country there was little appreciation of the need for the state to be more directly involved in naval defence. Cosgrave's view was that an army of 10,000 to 12,000 men would be sufficient as a deterrent against internal disorder while also being a satisfactory nucleus for a defensive force against an external enemy, such defensive force being capable of cooperating with British forces until an alternative strategy was adopted.[13] The army General Staff was of the view that an entirely independent defence strategy should be adopted.[14]

Even though it was agreed as part of the treaty that Article 6, dealing with Britain's exclusive control over coastal defence, would be reviewed by both governments by December 1926, there was little debate in the oireachtas about it. One of the few deputies to raise the matter was Osmond Esmonde, a Cumann na nGaedheal member from Wexford. He complained about his difficulty in getting information on government and army policy regarding Article 6, and also their policy in relation to the review of the article the following year.[15] He berated the government for its tardiness in formulating an

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[10] Kevin O'Higgins, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xi, col. 1559, 15 May 1925.
[11] Desmond FitzGerald, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xxix, col. 1157, 1 May 1929.
[12] Frank Kerlin, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xxix, col. 1166, 1 May 1929.
[13] Cosgrave, memorandum on defence policy, 28 Oct. 1925, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, ii, 439-40.
[14] Lt-Gen. P. MacMahon, memorandum on Irish defence policy, 22 July 1925 (MAI, CDA/5; CDA 1/5).
[15] Osmond Grattan Esmonde, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xi, cols. 1570-71, 14 May 1925.

overall policy for the army and for the defence of the country, urging the minister to

> orient his whole defence policy with the object of dealing adequately and immediately with the situation which will be created when that Article comes to be fulfilled in 18 months' time ... to draw up proposals for the defence and for such portions of that defence as can be taken immediately after the conference under Article 6 of the Treaty takes place next year. A nation which leaves its defence permanently to others, by that very fact ceases to be a nation and becomes a Protectorate.[16]

In fact, Esmonde was unable to extract the information because at that time the Executive Council itself did not know what position it should adopt when it would came to face with the British government in a year's time to discuss the possibility of Ireland undertaking a share of the coastal defence. Peter Hughes, the Minister for Defence, admitted as much in his contribution to the debate. His reply was: 'I am not in a position so far, nor do I think it would be in the interests of the public to say, what the policy of the Executive Council will be when that comes up to be considered.'[17]

Ernest Blythe, the Minister for Finance, attempted to broaden the topic by drawing on the wider implications of an international conflict whereby 'a situation might arise in which this country would not easily be outside the war-zone, if I may put it that way', and then suggesting that the country should look towards a defence force that was capable of being expanded quickly to whatever size might be needed to defend the country without the need of assistance of 'troops from outside the country'.[18] The dilemma for all TDs was that while they all wanted to have an army capable of mounting a creditable defence against an aggressor, they did not want to deal with the consequence of raising money to pay for it.

In fact, the initiative on Article 6 was taken by the army itself in March 1925 when Lt-Gen. Peadar MacMahon circulated a memorandum on defence policy to each member of the Executive Council. MacMahon recognised that the *raison d'etre* of the army had changed since 1922 and that a clear vision of its future needed to be determined. It was now necessary to consider its role towards the separate questions of 'external aggression and internal

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[16] Esmonde, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xi, cols. 1527, 14 May 1925
[17] Peter Hughes, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xi, cols 1563, 14 May 1925.
[18] Ernest Blythe, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xi, cols 1586- 87, 14 May 1925.

aggression'.[19] The memorandum was wide-ranging in its breadth of topics and took a strong stance on how the army viewed its own position and that of the British army in the defended forts. MacMahon recognised the importance of Ireland's geographical location to Britain's defences, describing them as being both the 'aerial and submarine key to England... a dangerously vulnerable point and one of her most important lines of defence'.[20]

The purpose of the memorandum was to lay out all of the possible military options that were open to consideration by the Executive Council, and this even included amalgamating with British forces under a single command in the event of war. However, it did not make any specific recommendation or favour any particular course of action; this was a purely political decision that had to be made.

The content of the Dáil debates caused some unease in Whitehall. The General Staff read the debate as giving an indication that the 'Free State was likely to include Article 7 in the forthcoming review.'[21] This was the clause that granted Britain harbour and other facilities in Ireland in time of war, and was separate from Article 6 which concerned the defence by sea of Great Britain and Ireland. The Admiralty was also aware of the debates and took particular note of Osmond Esmonde's comment that a nation that left its defence to others was no longer a nation.[22] Both the War Office and the Admiralty were deciphering the signs as meaning that the Irish government would be attending the review of the treaty with the objectives of taking over the forts and establishing at least the nucleus of an Irish navy. The War Office took the opportunity of saying that they would 'welcome the withdrawal of our forces from the Irish Free State as detachments of this nature render difficult supervision and administration in peace, and control and maintenance in war.'[23] The Admiralty took the opposite view, emphasising that there could not be any possibility of quitting the forts, nor should there be even an opportunity of discussing such a possibility at the conference.[24]

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[19] Memorandum on defence policy, 22 July 1925 (MAI, CDA/5; CDA 1/5), p. 5;.in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, ii. p. 414.
[20] Ibid., p.6; Ibid., p. 415.
[21] General Staff memorandum, 3 June 1925 (TNA, ADM 178/161).
[22] Minutes of Admiralty Naval Staff committee, 28 May 1925 (TNA, ADM 178/161).
[23] General Staff memorandum to CID, 22 Sept. 1925 (TNA, CAB 3/4).
[24] Admiralty memorandum to CID, 26 Oct. 1925 (TNA, CAB 3/4).

This was to be the shape of discussions about the future of the ports until 1938: the Admiralty forever arguing for their strategic importance, the War Office arguing that they cost too much and were not necessary to imperial defence. However, the motivation behind the War Office's desire to vacate the forts was not strategic, but financial. The costs of maintaining over one thousand regular army troops and specialists, civilians, and families in Ireland was borne entirely by the War Office. The War Office was further exasperated with the position in Ireland because all defended anchorages in Britain had been taken over and manned by the Territorial Army at a vastly reduced cost to the War Office.

Only a few months earlier, the Committee on the Defence of British Ports (a sub-committee of the General Staff) had discussed the Irish ports, decided that they were inadequate for Britain's defence needs, and proposed a modified plan for defended bases in Ireland that was to be adopted in the event of war. Taking account of Articles 6 and 7 of the treaty, they proposed that Cobh would no longer be the main base but would be the base for patrols in the western approaches. Berehaven now assumed prime importance and was to be the base for the main fleet. Lough Swilly, Dublin and Waterford were to be bases for patrols in their areas. [25] They also recommended that both Berehaven and Lough Swilly should be provided with extra defences to be fully manned in peacetime before the outbreak of hostilities, and even suggested that adequate defences be provided for Dublin and Waterford.[26]

Amery was dismissive of the proposals, not just because they conflicted with the terms of the treaty, but because he knew that it would be impossible to acquire the extra lands that were required. Instead of just rejecting them though, he advised the CID to specify precisely which lands were required, and he would then send a secret draft of the proposal to the Governor General for forwarding to the Irish government.[27] There is no record that this ever happened, probably as he expected.

Nevertheless, the possibility of reducing the number of personnel in the forts to 'nucleus garrisons' was again discussed at a meeting of the CID in

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[25] Memorandum by sub-Committee on Defence of British Ports, June 1924 (TNA, CAB 36/17).
[26] Ibid.
[27] Leo Amery, letter to CID, 26 Nov. 1924 (TNA, CAB 36/17).

October 1925.[28] Worthington-Evans, the Secretary of State for War, opened the discussion by complaining about the costs of maintaining the garrisons and again sought to have them reduced. Lord Cavan, the Chief of the General Staff, added the information that the batteries were costing £126,000 per year but that this could be reduced to £26,000 if they were reduced to 'nucleus' garrisons. If this was not done, there would have to be an additional cost of £150,000 for renovating and upgrading the current facilities which, he claimed, were wholly unsatisfactory.[29] Beatty, unsurprisingly, flatly disagreed, and reiterated the Admiralty view that the ports were 'of supreme importance' in a European war, and that the meeting should give its attention to the forthcoming Anglo-Irish conference with a view to ensuring that no discussion took place on Article 7 of the treaty.[30] A compromise agreement was reached that the Chiefs of Staff should be asked to consider the possibility of making some reduction in the numbers of troops in the forts.

The Chiefs of Staff met the following week to explore how this could be done.[31] Beatty took the initiative, arguing that it was impossible to decrease the manpower because Berehaven was the only anchorage for the main fleet in home waters which combined security with proximity to the strategic areas; that in a war with France Lough Swilly would be an essential convoy point; and that Cobh would be an essential base for light forces in a similar war.

Lord Cavan, while not disagreeing, listed areas where reductions in manpower could be made and forts that he felt could be safely abandoned, but in the end he did not advocate either course because it was felt that there was still a risk that the forts might be attacked by 'malcontents and irreconcilables in the Irish Free State'. He concluded by stating a reality that was to be at the heart of any discussion about evacuating the forts in later years:

> the value of the South Irish Coastal Defence to the Navy as bases must, in any end, depend on the goodwill of the Irish Free State, without which their defence in war would become almost an impossible commitment.[32]

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[28] Minutes of CID meeting, 29 Oct. 1925 (TNA, CAB 2/4; ADM 178/161).
[29] Minutes of CID meeting, 29 Oct. 1925 (TNA, CAB 2/4; ADM 178/161).
[30] Ibid.
[31] Minutes of COS meeting, 5 Nov. 1925 (TNA, CAB 53/1).
[32] Ibid.

Worthington-Evans applied the same logic a year later when the CID was considering vacating part of Bere Island. In reply to the Admiralty's objection to such a proposal he said

> rather heavy weather is being made over a very small matter. If the Irish Free State were friendly when we wished to re-occupy the west end of Bere Island, no difficulty would arise. If, on the other hand, they were unfriendly, the place would be untenable and the situation would be no worse than if we had never evacuated the defences.[33]

This was the position taken by the Dominions Office over the coming years, even in the years when de Valera began to agitate for the return of the ports. Amery, and his successors, strove to maintain harmonious relations with the Irish Free State and recognised how it would be almost impossible to maintain three military bases in wartime if they did not have the willing co-operation of the state.

The CID continued to stress the importance of the Irish bases during the next few years. In fact, Berehaven assumed an even greater importance in its thinking when it was described as being

> most suitable for use as a base for the main fleet, just as was Scapa Flow in the late war. There is no other western or southern harbour equally well adapted for this purpose...Berehaven is destined to be, in certain contingencies, the base for our main fleet and, as such, must remain under our direct control.[34]

It was also agreed by the CID, at the suggestion of Sir Charles Madden, the First Sea Lord, that the Irish government should not be made aware of the importance that British government was now attaching to Berehaven, or that it was to be the designated base for the main fleet.[35]

In Ireland, the Department of Defence had also been making preparations for the December 1926 conference, and a number of reports on defence were drawn up. Lt-Gen. Peadar MacMahon, on behalf of the General Staff, submitted a memorandum on coastal defence in March 1926, a follow-up to the of memorandum the previous year to which he had received no

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[33] Minutes of CID meeting, 29 July 1926 (TNA/ADM 1/8723/303).
[34] Report by CID sub-committee on the Irish treaty, 19 Jan. 1928 (TNA, CAB 16/70).
[35] Minutes of CID meeting, 16 Feb. 1928 (TNA, CAB 2/5).

meaningful reply, in which he made clear the course of action he would like the Executive Council to adopt.[36]

MacMahon's interpretation of Article 6 was that it was 'merely a temporary arrangement pending the assumption by the government of An Saorstát of responsibility for such defence' and that the impending conference was arranged with this in mind.[37] Some of his argument referred to the 'enhanced international and diplomatic prestige' that would ensue once the state had total control over its coastal defence but he also put forward some less nebulous reasons. MacMahon suggested that there would be no adverse financial consequences in taking over the ports because the British government would probably expect the Irish Free State to share in the costs of their military and naval operations in Ireland, and there was a likelihood that whatever British naval forces were based in Ireland would be considerably in excess of the country's own needs. It is very probable that MacMahon's assumptions were influenced by a post-war recommendation by Earl Jellicoe on how the imperial navy should be funded, and how much each dominion should contribute.

Jellicoe had been sent on a tour of the dominions to review imperial naval policy and to advise dominion navies on their future. There was no doubt in Jellicoe's mind that the dominions' contribution to the imperial navy was wholly inadequate, and his solution was to impose a levy per head of population towards this cost. He proposed a figure of 17 shillings per head for the main dominions but 23 shillings per head for the Irish Free State and Britain ('the older parts of the empire'), thus ensuring that 'considerable relief would be afforded to the British taxpayer.'[38] Jellicoe's suggestions were quite unrealistic and were not acted upon. He expected the dominions and Ireland to contribute £18,550,000 towards a total Admiralty budget of £69,050,000, and in this the Irish contribution would have been approximately £4,000,000 while Canada was expected to pay £7,200,000 when its pre-war naval force consisted of two elderly cruisers and a total annual naval budget of

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[36] 'Memorandum on the position in regard to the coastal defence of Ireland created by Article 6 of the treaty of 1921', 31 Mar. 1926 (MA, CDA/19 ;CDA 2/19).
[37] Ibid.
[38] Jellicoe, 'Naval policy of the empire: need for co-operation', in *Brassey's naval and shipping annual* (March, 1926), copy in (MA, CDA/1; CDA 1/1).

£420,000.[39] Nevertheless, while Jellicoe's actual figures were unrealistic they indicated a train of thought at the Admiralty of which MacMahon was wise to take account.

MacMahon also argued that if the British were at war it would be almost certain that there would be a bombardment of Irish coastal towns and attacks around the coast and it would be necessary for the state to provide more defended bases for whatever marine forces were involved in defending Ireland's coastline.[40]

The memorandum urged the government to consider a modest naval force comprising some motor launches and minesweepers, and ruled out the possibility of having even one destroyer because of the financial implications. He accepted that the country could never afford the cost of establishing a navy that could provide adequate protection for the country but, accepting that the British government would not relinquish the right to remain in control of sea defences, concluded: 'we can depend on them to engage any naval force which deliberately threatens the Irish coast.'[41]

MacMahon recognised that the balance of naval power had changed from the North Sea to the Atlantic 'with the consequent restoration of our South and West Coast to its old position as a place of first class strategic importance navally' and that in a future war between Britain and another power with ports on the Atlantic, the position for sea-borne traffic would be infinitely worse.[42] His assessment of the situation was proved in 1940. MacMahon also pointed out the obvious: if the country was to assume complete responsibility for its defence, 'it is impossible to do without a naval as well as a military service.'[43]

While both sides were still preparing for the December Anglo-Irish conference, Amery requested a postponement of the meeting because his side was not ready to proceed.[44] This was because the Imperial Conference in

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[39] Ibid.
[40] 'Memorandum on the position in regard to the coastal defence of Ireland created by Article 6 of the treaty of 1921', 31 Mar. 1926 (MA, CDA/19; CDA 2/19).
[41] Ibid.
[42] MacMahon , 'memorandum on coast defence (sea)', to Minister for Defence, 7 July 1926 (MA, CDA/1/5; CDA/5).
[43] Ibid.
[44] Amery to Healy, 1 Dec. 1926 (MA, CDA/21; CDA 2/21).

London had ended only the week previously and the Dominions Office had been fully involved in it. The postponement suited the Irish government and a new date for a meeting was to be fixed for late February.

The CID had appointed a sub-committee in July 1926, the 'sub-committee on the Irish Treaty', that was tasked with the objective of formulating a common policy by the three armed services in preparation for the planned December 1926 conference. The sub-committee was chaired by Amery, and he was a strong influence in its deliberations. He made it clear at the outset that there would be no question of Article 7 being discussed and he reiterated his personal view on how open discussion and cooperation with the Irish authorities would produce better results than insistence on legal rights.[45]

This committee did not meet again until 16 December when there was discussion about the term 'coastal defence' and exactly what it meant. In other words, what was meant in Article 6 by Ireland undertaking 'a share in her own coastal defence'? It had never been intended that Ireland would be expected, or allowed, to do much more than take over some minor naval duties, but when the wording was being re-analysed it was realised that there was ambiguity in the term, as the sub-committee was not clear 'whether coastal defence referred to defences on land as well as afloat.'[46] Not unnaturally, the sub-committee decided that the term referred to defence 'afloat' as there could be no question of the Irish army providing the defence for the forts. Despite having an initial difficulty over the meaning of the term, the meeting also decided that 'it would not be necessary at the present time to obtain an exact definition as to the meaning of the term "coastal defence"', presumably because of the possibility of opening a Pandora's box.[47] Amery re-directed the course of the discussion by asking what naval craft could be included in vessels that would be involved in coastal defence. The sub-committee realised the problems that would arise if the Irish representatives took a different interpretation. It was then decided that Amery should write to the Irish government asking for 'indications as to the nature of and extent of the share which they desire to take in the coastal defence of the Irish Free

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[45] Minutes of sub-committee on the Irish treaty, 13 July 1926 (TNA, CAB 16/70).
[46] Minutes of sub-committee on the Irish treaty, 16 Dec.1926 (TNA, CAB 16/70).
[47] Ibid.

State.'[48] Amery, in his diaries, describes his letter as being 'a fishing letter' for the purpose of finding out what the Irish government was thinking and to allow themselves to 'postpone action until we knew the answer.'[49]

In fact, the ambiguity of the term had also been recognised by the Department of Defence. Lt-Gen. P. MacMahon sent a memorandum to Peter Hughes on 11 January 1927 that was circulated to members of the Executive Council in response to Amery's letter.[50] Amery wanted to find out in advance of the next Anglo-Irish meeting what the Irish representatives would be proposing so that he could prepare the British position. MacMahon advised Hughes that 'coastal defence' was capable of being argued to have a very narrow or a very wide interpretation. To the layman it implied the provision of all arms, whether land, sea, or air, necessary to defend a coastline. This, he pointed out, was also how the term was implied in the German and French defence forces. To the British, however, traditional coastal defence meant defence of the coastline by artillery in defended forts. Consequently, he urged the Executive Council to make use of the ambiguity and at the forthcoming conference to seek a takeover of the forts as the state's commitment to assuming a share of coastal defence, rather than agreeing to establish a force of converted fishing trawlers as minesweepers.[51] However, while he advised the Executive Council to adopt this position MacMahon recognised that it was not what had been intended in article 6 because he observed that the wording in the article would 'incline one to believe that it was ships and naval matters which were in the minds of those who drafted the clause.'[52]

The Executive Council took a decision in mid-January that they would pursue a policy of taking over the forts even though they had not yet completed an examination of what would be involved and whether or not the state could absorb the costs of doing so.[53]

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[48] Amery to Healy, 11 Jan. 1927 (MA, CDA/2 CDA 2/21).
[49] *The Leo Amery diaries*, eds., John Barnes and David Nicholson, (2 vols, London, 1980), 16 Dec. 1926, i, 486.
[50] Leo Amery to Healy, 1 Jan. 1927 (MA, CD/21; CDA 2/21).
[51] MacMahon to Minister for Defence, 11 Jan. 1927 (MA, CDA/16; CDA 1/16).
[52] MacMahon, memorandum on coastal defence, 22 Jan. 1927, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, iii, 86.
[53] M. McDunphy, Dept. of the President, to Minister for Defence, 25 Jan. 1927 (MA, CDA/31; CDA 3/31).

An important consideration in any plan to take over the reserved ports was the cost that would be incurred in doing so.. The annual cost to the British exchequer for maintaining the forts in 1926-7 was £165,000,[54] and the Department of Defence prepared their estimates on their knowledge of the number of military and civilian personnel retained by the War Office in the forts, even though they knew that 'the British figures on which provisional establishment is based had already been subjected to detailed examination and reduced to a minimum.'[55] The figures showed 978 military personnel of all ranks in the three ports and a further 153 civilians at Cobh and Berehaven. These figures appear to be quite accurate because War Office figures from 1924 showed a total of 946 military personnel in the three forts,[56] (a figure that was reduced even further by 1932 when the total complement was shown as 728).[57]

The Department of Defence's initial estimate of the annual cost of maintaining the forts was £158,000 but this was reduced to £122,089 following objections from the Department of Finance, and was based on an establishment of 886 all ranks (55 officers and 831 other ranks) and 50 civilians.[58] J.J. McElligott, the Secretary of the Department of Finance, was not at all happy with the estimates. In his reply to GHQ he opened by recognising that the matter of personnel required to man the forts was 'to a great extent a technical matter' but he then questioned why captains could not do the job of commandants; why privates could not do the work of corporals; why a regular quartermaster could not take responsibility for both munitions and technical equipment; and why any civilians needed to be employed.[59] His objections show that he had little knowledge of the technical aspects of maintaining artillery bases and his only objective was to reduce costs regardless of the consequences. The Irish army at this time was

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[54] F. Wise (for First Lord of Admiralty), *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, cc, col.2313, 9 Dec. 1926.
[55] Reports on cost of maintaining defence of reserved ports, n.d. (MA, CDA/31; CDA 3/31). These very detailed reports are undated but their context and content dates them to 1926. It is probable that they were the estimates that were prepared by Thomas Gorman, Army Finance Officer and referred to in MA, CDA/32; CDA3/32).
[56] War Office memorandum 24 Mar. 1924 (TNA, CO 739/26).
[57] General Staff memorandum to ISC, 6 Apr. 1932 (TNA, CAB 27/525).
[58] Coast defence detailed statement of cost, n.d. (MA, CDA/5; CDA 1/5).
[59] McElligott to C.B. O'Connor, GHQ, 22 Feb. 1926 (MA, CDA/32; CDA/32).

essentially an infantry force and it did not have the numbers of trained technical personnel ready to take over and run the forts.

Thomas Gorman indicated a couple of months later that when full information was available on what would be involved in any takeover, the number of Irish military personnel could be even higher than the British number on which his estimates were based, because all of the British personnel were already trained and experienced.[60] Gorman's estimate of £122,089 was for personnel only. He also estimated an expenditure of £367,000 for ammunition and £84,900 on guns (if they had to be purchased).[61]

The Admiralty was the driving force behind the decision not to enter into any discussion on returning the forts and, in this, they again had the support of a powerful ally in Winston Churchill when he was re-elected in 1924 and appointed Chancellor. At a critical meeting of the CID on 15 February 1927, at which the forthcoming Anglo-Irish conference was discussed, he re-asserted his belief in the need for the reserved ports and stated that 'it would be most unwise' to contemplate any move to withdraw from them and that thoughts of any such move 'should at least be postponed for, say, ten years'.[62] He was assured by both Amery and Worthington-Evans that no such proposals were contemplated.[63] Despite his plans for widespread cuts in expenditure, especially in the armed services, Churchill never entertained any thoughts of relinquishing control over the reserved ports.

The First Lord of the Admiralty at this time, William Bridgeman, was also at this meeting but he did not add to the discussion. Bridgeman was First Lord from 1924 to 1929 and his time in office was marked by continual conflict with Churchill over annual naval estimates. Churchill's attitude towards Admiralty spending could hardly have been more different to his attitude in the immediate post-war years. Two years earlier he had been strongly against the axing of the Admiralty's spending programme by the Geddes committee, even writing to Amery from his holiday resort in France complaining that a start had not been made on the construction of two new

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[60] Gorman, memorandum to McMahon, 11 Apr. 1927 (MA, CDA 32; CDA/3/32).
[61] Coast defence detailed statement of cost, n.d. (MA, CDA/5; CDA 1/5).
[62] Minutes of CID meeting 15 Feb. 1927 (TNA/CAB 2/4).
[63] Ibid.

cruisers (Churchill was Colonial Secretary at the time).[64] Now, as Chancellor, he was imposing more pressure on the Admiralty to reduce expenditure and to slash its modest shipbuilding programme.

Bridgeman was a strong conservative imperialist who had been against Home Rule, on the basis that it threatened the integrity of the empire.[65] Yet, he became a pragmatist on the Anglo-Irish treaty, recognising that an agreement was the inevitable solution to the problem.[66] While he admired Churchill, he disliked his power because of the threat it presented to the navy, and he was in complete disagreement with his policy of naval cutbacks over the years. He was also fearful of the political damage that Churchill could cause: 'The influence of Winston is thoroughly bad, and if everyone gives in to him, he will ruin our party.'[67] Bridgeman attended all three CID meetings between 1925 and 1928 at which the question of vacating the ports was discussed, yet his only recorded contribution was to ask a rather silly question about who would defend Queenstown if it were to be handed back to the Irish Free State.[68]

The February date for the conference passed without a new date being set. Then both sides agreed that it would be beneficial if a meeting of technical (meaning military) experts from both sides met at a preliminary informal meeting.[69] However, this took longer to arrange than was anticipated so a date for the conference proper was again postponed. In fact, it was only during this time that McElligott queried Defence's estimated costs.

The meeting of technical representatives finally took place on 26 April 1927 in the Admiralty offices in Whitehall. The British representatives, headed by Admiral Dudley Pound, Assistant Chief of Naval Staff, comprised nine military officers and one civil servant from the Dominions Office. The Irish representatives were Diarmuid O'Hegarty, Lt-Gen. Peadar MacMahon, J.J. McElligott, Major-General Hogan, and Comdt. Dan Bryan.[70] O'Hegarty had

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[64] Churchill to Amery, 9 Dec. 1922 (CAC, Amery papers AMEL 1/3/67).
[65] Philip Williamson (ed.), *The modernisation of Conservative politics: the diaries and letters of William Bridgeman, 1904-1935* (London, 1988), p. 7.
[66] William Bridgeman, letter to Caroline Bridgeman, 19 Dec. 1921, *The modernisation of Conservative politics: the diaries and letters of William Bridgeman, 1904-1935* (London, 1988).
[67] Ibid.
[68] Minutes of CID meeting, 16 Feb. 1928 (TNA, CAB 2/5); (TNA, ADM 178/161).
[69] Healy to Amery, Apr. 1927 (MA, CDA/31: CDA 3/31).
[70] O'Hegarty to Cosgrave 26 Apr. 1927 (MA, CDA/21: CDA 2/21).

advised the Irish technical representatives in advance of this meeting that it was the intention of the Irish government not to undertake the provision and maintenance of any warships other than vessels as may be necessary for fisheries and revenue protection.[71] They were also informed that the Executive Council did not think it feasible, at that time, 'to provide and maintain any ships of war other than such vessels as may be necessary for the protection of revenue and fisheries' and if this topic were raised they were instructed to state that financial considerations precluded the state from doing any more.[72] In other words, the Executive Council wanted to take over the forts but not to have anything to do with naval defence. From an economic viewpoint this may have been a sensible decision but the government's subsequent failure to make a commitment to a moderately-sized naval defence force was to have adverse effects on an Irish fishing industry that could have provided valuable employment along the whole western seaboard of the country.

At the meeting O'Hegarty stated that the aim of his government, as a step towards assuming full responsibility for Irish coastal defence, was 'taking over the forts and defences of the three reserved ports' and asked for information about the financial liabilities that would be involved.[73] Admiral Pound's response was that his brief did not empower him to have any discussion on returning the ports.[74] Doing so, he maintained, would entail discussion on Article 7 which stood independently of Article 6 and which did not cover coastal defence as envisaged in the text. He said that the Admiralty had come to the conclusion that the best way for the state to be involved was by way of 'a small minesweeping service' of between eight and twenty vessels.[75]

In reply, O'Hegarty said that his own instructions were to find out everything that would be involved in taking over the three defended ports and that he had no instructions about organising local naval forces.[76] O'Hegarty

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[71] O'Hegarty, memorandum and draft instructions to Irish technical representatives, 22 Apr. 1927 (MA, CDA/21; CDA 2/21); *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, iii, 111-12.
[72] Ibid.
[73] British minutes of meeting at the Admiralty, 26 Apr. 1927 (TNA, CAB 16/70); O'Hegarty to Cosgrave, account of meeting at the Admiralty, 26Apr. 1927 (MA, CDA/18; CDA 1/18).
[74] O'Hegarty to Cosgrave, 26 Apr. 1927 (MA, CDA/18; CDA 1/18).
[75] British minutes of meeting at Admiralty, 26 Apr. 1927 (TNA, CAB 16/70).
[76] Ibid..

felt that it would be futile to attempt to proceed because he could see that the British representatives had been prepared for the Irish response and had been instructed to act accordingly.[77] Little more was discussed and the meeting broke up.

The cabinet discussed Amery's report of the meeting the following day and confirmed that the Irish representatives should be told that the cabinet would not discuss the handing over of the ports, 'and that consequently there was no object in furnishing the information asked for'.[78] This, however, was not Amery's preferred option. In his report, his strong advice to the cabinet was to allow the War Office and Admiralty to give the information but on condition that it would be without prejudice to any discussion at ministerial level on the ports.[79] Following this cabinet decision the formal Anglo-Irish conference, already postponed twice, did not take place, and the Irish government let the matter lie.

The ambiguity over the term 'coastal defence' continued to be of concern in Whitehall because the sub-committee on the Irish treaty again raised the topic for discussion at a meeting on 3 November 1927.[80] Capt. Egerton, the Admiralty Director of Plans, was concerned that the CID might take a different interpretation to that of his own sub-committee and he suggested that their interpretation should be conveyed to the CID. Sir Henry Batterbee, of the Dominions Office, was not prepared to go along without challenging the suggestion, and he asked whether the Admiralty 'were really definitely of the opinion that the meaning of "coastal defence" in Article 6 should be limited to naval defence.'[81] Egerton also argued that the state was already responsible for the whole of its coastal defence by land, and that it was time for 'bearing a share of the local naval defence'.[82] By this, he meant that the Irish Free State should provide its own minesweeping and patrol vessels and relieve the Royal Navy from some of these duties.

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[77] O'Hegarty to Cosgrave, account of meeting at the Admiralty, 26Apr. 1927 (MA, CDA/18; CDA 1/18).
[78] Minutes of cabinet meeting, 27 Apr. 1927 (TNA/CAB 23/54).
[79] Amery memorandum to cabinet, 26 Apr. 1927 (TNA/ CAB 24/186).
[80] Minutes of sub-committee on the Irish treaty, 7 Nov. 1927 (TNA, CAB 16/70).
[81] Ibid.
[82] Minutes of CID sub-committee on the Irish treaty, 3 Nov. 1927 (TNA, CAB 16/70).

Major-General B. Humphreys took the opportunity of stating the War Office's position and declared 'the sooner the Irish Free State was able 'to assume responsibility for the defence of all her ports the better.'[83]

The proposed Anglo-Irish conference was never formally abandoned, and the sub-committee continued to prepare for it. They met the following month and re-hashed their previous arguments on why the Irish government should not be allowed to take over the ports. They came to agreement that the Admiralty interpretation of 'coastal defence' as it applied to the transfer of the reserved ports was 'unassailable' and they recommended that the British representatives at any conference 'should base their case in the first place on the legal grounds set out above.'[84] Nevertheless, despite this unequivocal assertion, it would appear that Batterbee's view also prevailed because their final report to the CID carried a caution:

> It should perhaps here be mentioned that the precise meaning attached to the words 'undertaking a share of her own coastal defence' has not yet been authoritatively laid down. It appears from the records of the time that, in the view of the Admiralty, the intention to be conveyed by those words was that the Irish Free State might acquire the right to maintain auxiliary vessels for the naval defence of her ports (other than Queenstown, Berehaven, and Lough Swilly), but not sea-going naval forces for more extended operations; but whether this intention was carried out by Article 6 as actually worded we are not quite clear. A distinction appears to have been drawn between "coastal defence" and "defence by sea" and it appears to argue from the use of the word "until" that, while, up to the time when the arrangement for the undertaking by the Irish Free State of her own coastal defence is made, the defence by sea of Great Britain and Ireland is to remain entirely a responsibility of the British Navy.[85]

Reference was also made to the prime minister's earlier speech indicating that the Irish Free State was to be forever restricted to auxiliary craft but that the legal ambiguities regarding coastal defence 'could only be authoritatively settled by a reference to the Law Officers, but there appears to be a certain advantage in leaving the matter in an indefinite state.'[86] In other

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[83] Ibid.
[84] Minutes of sub-committee on the Irish treaty, 19 Jan. 1928 (TNA, CAB 16/70).
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.

words, they did not want a Law Officers' opinion for fear that it might not be to their advantage.

Much of the report concentrates on sea defence and on a desire for the Irish Free State to have an involvement in it and to provide local protection for those ports under state control, but only with very modest coastal vessels. The state was not to be allowed anything resembling a warship, even though they were aware that the Irish government had 'no desire whatever at present to maintain a sea-going naval force'.[87] There was not a great deal of discussion about the Irish Free State taking over the ports: the Admiralty's position prevailed, and the sub-committee's conclusion was that this could not even be contemplated, rejecting any thought that 'coastal defence' could be interpreted as allowing this to happen. They summarised their arguments by stating that the British representatives should base their refusal to discuss the transfer of the ports on three grounds:

> (i) That such a transfer was not contemplated by the Articles of Agreement of 1921, and would involve an amendment of them.
> (ii) That the control of these ports is essential to the defence of our Western trade routes and inter-imperial communications in the event of war.
> (iii) That Berehaven is destined to be, in certain contingencies, the base of our main fleet, and as such must remain under our direct control and in our effective possession.[88]

Neither government made an attempt to resurrect the conference, and political action on the ports stalled. A new Labour government under Ramsay MacDonald came to power in June 1929, in coalition with what remained of the Liberals, but it had more pressing matters to deal with than defence arrangements with Ireland. MacDonald's priority was to continue his policy of introducing new social legislation that had started under his previous short-lived government, but at the same time dealing with widespread financial problems. The new Dominions Office Secretary, Lord Passmore, was more interested in wider European affairs, particularly in the Soviet Union, and did not concern himself too deeply with Irish affairs. Once, when Timothy Smiddy asked him over dinner in February 1930 about the withdrawal of British troops from the reserved ports and the likely beneficial effect it could have on

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[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.

Anglo-Irish relations, he made no reply, except when pressed, to talk generally about the principle of a republic within the empire.[89]

Sir Laming Worthington-Evans was succeeded in the War Office by Thomas Shaw but his interests lay more with social conditions in England than in defence. So, even though the Admiralty lost its strongest supporter on Irish coastal defence with Churchill's departure from the Treasury, there were no new faces in the War Office or the Dominions Office pushing for the withdrawal of troops. As one historian asserts, the new cabinet relied heavily on the advice of the service chiefs and Sir Maurice Hankey, secretary to both the cabinet and the CID, but Hankey's enthusiasm waned because of a reciprocal lack of enthusiasm by the Irish government.[90]

While these deliberations were going on in Whitehall, similar thoughts were being discussed in Dublin. When the Department of Defence began preparing its recommendations on the military aspects of coastal defence in 1924-5, they also prepared plans for a naval service. Unfortunately, these were unrealistic and unsuitable for the time, and they suffered through the absence of input from someone with appropriate naval expertise and from inter-departmental wrangling.

In fact, there had been a naval service, of sorts, in operation in the new Irish Free State from 1922. During the Civil War, the Marine Investigation Department was set up as part of the new National Army mainly as a counter to the illegal landing of guns and ammunition around the coast by those opposed to the treaty. It operated in all the main ports around the country checking the cargoes of all incoming vessels. The department operated with an assortment of craft including trawlers and motor boats. Because of a need for a more suitable coastal patrol vessel, the department commandeered the *Helga* from the Department for Agriculture and Fisheries on 13 July 1923.[91] The *Helga* retained her civilian crew but an army officer and detachment of soldiers were also on board.[92] The vessel was well-known because she had been commandeered by the British army during the Rising in 1916, sailed up

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[89] Smiddy, confidential report to Joseph P. Walshe, 28 Feb. 1930, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, iii, p. 512.
[90] Canning, *British policy towards Ireland*, p. 182.
[91] Timothy Collins, 'Helga/Muirchu', in *Journal of the Galway archaeological and historical society*, liv, (2002), pp 158-60 (www.jstor.org.)
[92] Ibid.

the Liffey and used to shell buildings that were held by rebels. The *Helga* was also used extensively to ferry national army troops around the country, to bring relief supplies, and was involved in troop landings.[93]

At the end of the Civil War, the Marine Investigation Department was disbanded, and in its place the Coastal and Marine Service was established under the command of Major-General Joseph Vize in March 1923. The department acquired twelve patrol trawlers, all equipped with twelve-pounder guns, and an assortment of other craft including the *Helga*, which had been re-named *Muirchú*. The vessels were actively involved in the prevention of gun-running and fisheries protection.[94]

However, before this new service had time to establish a presence for itself the government decided to disband it in March 1924. The *Muirchú* was returned to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and other vessels in the service were either returned to their original owners or sold.[95] The government of the newly independent island state saw no need or benefit in retaining a coordinated marine service for either fisheries' protection or revenue collection. After the abortive talks with the British government in 1927, the same government felt no need to be able to provide even a token defence of its shores, preferring to allow the Royal Navy provide all necessary protection.

A number of plans were drawn up during 1924-6 for a naval service along with plans for taking over the reserved ports. One proposal for such a service was drawn up by Captain James Johnston, in the Adjutant General's office, and Commandant James Fitzmaurice, of the Army Air Corps, but their plan was too ambitious for the time. They proposed a naval service comprising 1 cruiser, 3 destroyers, 6 or 8 high speed MTBs, 2 minelayers, 2 ocean-going tugs, and other auxiliary craft.[96] Johnston had already drawn up another plan that was considerably less ambitious but was probably still too costly to implement in its entirety. His plan was based on a fleet of patrol vessels that had given excellent service to the Royal Navy during the war, throughout the

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[93] Ibid.
[94] Daire Brunicardi, *The sea hound: the story of an Irish ship* (Cork, 2001), pp 70-3.
[95] Ibid., pp 77-8.
[96] Memorandum on coastal defence force, Apr. 1926 (MA, CDA/23; CDA 3/23).

British Isles, including Queenstown and Kingstown (Dun Laoghaire).[97] This was the 240-foot P-class patrol boat that had a complement of fifty men, and described by Admiral Bacon as 'the most successful of the war designed vessels. They have a speed of twenty knots...are very handy, good sea-boats and are ideal light patrol vessels. They can keep the sea in any reasonable weather and are very reliable.' The officer in charge of the fourteen of these boats that were stationed at Kingstown was also complimentary of the useful work done by them.[98]

Johnston's estimates of the cost of running such craft were described by the Adjutant General as 'very reasonable'.[99] Johnston also confirmed that the Royal Navy had reduced the number of these P-class boats on their active list and that several of them, along with spares, were surplus to their needs and could be obtained at an attractive price.[100] However, yet a third, and highly improbable, plan appears to have been drawn up by Johnston which included the P-class boats, but also four destroyers, one cruiser, one corvette, and a number of other vessels.[101]

The plans, however, did not find favour with the General Staff. Gen. Peadar MacMahon, in a memorandum on coastal defence in 1926, took a different view, recognising that

> Ireland cannot obviously afford heavily armed expensive craft for patrol purposes. Vessels of even the destroyer type would be much too expensive to maintain for our purposes. We are therefore forced to fall back on motor launches and are now investigating the possibilities of various types adopted for such purpose in other countries. The difficulty is to get a boat which possesses sufficient power and speed to avoid more powerful hostile craft, which will be capable of keeping at sea in any weather, and which, at the same time, would not involve too

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[97] Capt. James Johnston, 'Suggestions for the formation of a naval service'. n.d. but is most probably the report referred to by the Adjutant General in a letter dated 17 July 1924 to the GOC Forces, Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, elsewhere in CDA/23; CDA 3/23)

[98] Memoirs of Cdr. F.F. Towers A/SNO, Kingstown, unpublished typescript (IWM, P472/11440).

[99] Adjutant General to GOC Forces, Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, 17 July 1924 (MA, CDA/23; CDA 3/23).

[100] Capt. J. Johnston to Col. Costello, 16 June 1926 (MA, CDA/6; CDA 1/6).

[101] This report, 'Establishment of a naval defence force'is undated and unattributed but is in file CDA/1 which is entitled 'Memorandum on the establishment of a naval defence force by Captain J. Johnston' and is attached to a copy of Lt-Gen. McMahon's memorandum 'Coastal defence' dated 31 Mar. 1936 whih is also in CDA/5.

heavy initial expenditure and will be economical to maintain afterwards.[102]

The vessel that MacMahon deemed most suitable for the country's coastal defence was a 50- to 80-foot long motor boat, capable of 25 knots, a cruising speed of 14 knots, with a range of 250 miles, with a crew's complement of 14 or 15, and able to remain at sea in all weathers.[103] This was the specification given to the Department of Industry and Commerce, to obtain their experts' views and to find out if such a craft could be manufactured in the Irish Free State. In fact, such a vessel did not exist. The department's chief surveyor reported that a vessel built to those specifications 'would be an unusual boat' and that 'such a vessel could only be described as a freak'.[104] Johnston also made his opinion of this vessel known in a letter to the Adjutant General. He described it as 'an experimental type of craft [that] in the infancy of our development would be incurring an unjustifiable and surely unnecessary risk.'[105]

It is difficult to understand why this type of craft received such attention, given that the General Staff advice to the government was for 'a marine service composed of anti-submarine, patrol, minesweeping and mine laying and other local defence craft on a ten to twenty year programme.'[106] The term 'patrol' craft covers a wide spectrum of vessels, but the other craft are war-time vessels, except for those trawlers that would not be permanently converted. The most beneficial use of a marine/naval service in peacetime is in fisheries and revenue protection, and none of the above craft, with the

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[102] Lt-Gen. Peadar MacMahon, 'Memorandum on the position in regard to the coastal defence of Ireland created by Article 6 of the treaty of 1921', 31 Mar. 1926 (MA, CDA/1; CDA 1/1); CDA/16; CDA 2/16), CDA/19; CDA 2/19).

[103] Dept of Defence memorandum RM 8C, 'Specification for motor launch', n.d. (MA, CDA/23; CDA 3/23).

[104] E.J. Smyth, Dept of Industry and Commerce to Col. Costello, Chief of Staff's dept., 25 May 1926 (MA, CDA/23; CDA 3/23).

[105] Capt. J. Johnston to Col. Costello, 16 June 1926 (MAI, CDA/6; CDA 1/6). Johnston is an interesting character. He was born in Dublin, and served in the Royal Navy for 16 years until his discharge in 1919, working for the last six years as a clerk at various bases overseas, mainly at Mudros on an island in the Aegean and at Ismid in the sea of Marmora, where he was highly rated by his superiors (according to his references on leaving the navy). He was twice in ships that were torpedoed and sunk in the Dardanelles operations and was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal. He was discharged from the navy in 1918 with the rank of leading seaman. He joined the Irish army in 1922 and was commissioned in 1924. He applied for a transfer to the proposed naval service in 1925 but resigned his commission in 1926. His references on leaving the navy are in MA, CDA/23; (CDA 3/23.

[106] General Staff memorandum 'coastal defence – summary', n.d. but probably 1926 (MA, CDA/5; CDA 1/5).

possible exception of the 'patrol' craft would have been particularly suited to such work. However, the General Staff did acknowledge that their expertise in naval affairs was limited and they pointed out to the government that they were obliged to decide on naval matters when their officers 'were not in a position to make decisions backed by sufficient knowledge or experience.'[107] Neither the Executive Council nor subsequent governments took any steps to improve this state of affairs. In his annual report on the army for 1943, Lt-Gen. Dan McKenna stated that the 'lack of suitable officers is a serious handicap' to the development of the naval service.[108] He expanded on this the following year when he reported that the service had 'failed to develop properly either along military or naval lines' because of a 'looseness of control and lack of responsibility among the officers, and particularly among the senior officers.'[109] Even in later years, under the de Valera government, General Richard Mulcahy complained: 'With the League of Nations gone, we have a president informing us that we are not a naval nation and are not likely to be a naval nation, nor are we likely to embark on any expenditure for a navy.'[110]

Under the terms of the treaty, the Irish government was authorised to construct and maintain 'such vessels as are necessary for the protection of the Revenue or the Fisheries'. The Admiralty was not at all happy about this wording and complained about the vagueness of what constituted such vessels, believing that there was a danger in how the word could be interpreted.[111] Internationally, vessels for fisheries protection would not only be trawlers and motor launches. They would have been armed vessels, substantial sea-boats with a reasonable turn of speed and capable of patrolling at sea for extended periods in heavy seas. During the treaty negotiation in 1922, the Admiralty was adamant that the Irish Free State could not be allowed to have a navy, and it continued to hold this position at inter-services meetings in preparation for the expected 1926 review.

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[107] General Staff memorandum 'Coast defence (sea)', 7 July 1926 (MA, CDA/5; CDA 1/5); CDA 20; CDA 2/20).
[108] Michael Kennedy and Victor Laing (eds.), *The Irish defence forces 1940-1949: the chief of staff's reports* (Dublin, 2011), p. 402.
[109] Ibid. p. 402.
[110] Gen. R. Mulcahy, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lxii, col. 2575, 18 June 1936.
[111] Admiralty to Cabinet Secretary, 8 Dec. 1921 (TNA, ADM 116/178).

However, the Admiralty was not averse to the Ireland having some types of naval vessels in 1926. Indeed, they believed that the Irish Free State should be expected to play a role in naval defence and to relieve the Royal Navy of some of the burden that it would assume in wartime.[112] The types of vessels they deemed suitable were minesweepers, minelayers, and other patrol craft.[113] What they feared—and what the British public and parliament feared—was the Irish Free State being able to acquire submarines.[114] This would have been a realistic objective because they were relatively inexpensive and readily available, and the thought of the newly independent Irish state having the capability of sinking British warships could not be tolerated. Modest patrol vessels, with limited armaments, of the P-Class type, were an entirely different matter and would not have engendered any fear in 1926. In fact, the Admiralty had previously provided assistance to the Irish Free State in May 1922 in the purchase of four MTBs, eighty-foot motor launches armed with a twelve-pounder gun, before the Civil War, presumably for revenue and fisheries protection as provided under Article 6. Not all the vessels went into service though, as only one arrived in Dublin from Southampton in July 1922. While they were in transit from Southampton they ran into a storm and one boat sank, two managed to reach the safety of British ports, one of which went on fire later.[115]

In August 1926, the Admiralty, as part of its preparation for the review, and in anticipation of the Irish Free State taking over a share in sea defences, allowed for the Irish Free State having 'two sloops and twelve minesweepers'.[116] This represented a significant change in the Admiralty's attitude because it was the first time that sloop-type vessels had been mentioned as being appropriate for an Irish naval service. Sloops had been the mainstay of the Royal Navy in Queenstown during the war where they were used for patrol and convoy escort duties. They were of similar size to destroyers but only carried a crew of ninety, were not as fast, and carried

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[112] Report of the Naval Staff conference, 25 May 1926 (TNA, ADM 178/161).
[113] Capt. J. Egerton, Adm. Dir. of Plans, minutes of sub-committee on the Irish Treaty, 13 July, 1926 (TNA, CAB 16/70).
[114] John Gretton, *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, 15 Dec. 1921, cxxxxix, col. 148.
[115] Daire Brunicardi, *The sea hound: the story of an Irish ship* (Cork, 2001), p. 58.
[116] Alan Flint, Admiralty memorandum, 12 Aug. 1926 (TNA, ADM 1/8723/303).

fewer armaments. After the war, they were used in various countries for fisheries protection where they proved to be excellent vessels for the purpose.

If the Irish government had pursued a course at the review of using the opportunity to develop even the nucleus of a defensive naval service it is probable that they could have produced a convincing argument that would have won over not only the War Office and Dominions Office but the Admiralty as well. They would, in fact, have been pushing an already half-open door. There had been an expectation that the Irish government would want to have a share in naval defence, and Amery strongly advocated that the Irish Free State should have exactly the same treatment as the other dominions in this respect.[117] The Admiralty had already indicated their willingness to assist the Irish government in developing a naval service and had offered expert advice from British naval officers.[118] The Dominions Office had made a similar offer.[119] It would have been of inestimable benefit to the Irish government to have had access to Royal Navy experience in setting up even a modest naval service.

The episode exposed the absence of any expertise in the government services on naval affairs, but particularly in the Department of Defence where there was no interest in developing that expertise. The government's technical advisors on naval matters were all army men whose priorities were developing a professional army at a time when personnel numbers were still being trimmed and while having to contend with the threat from armed 'Irregulars' throughout the country. There was no incentive for them to commence developing a new service that would have needed extra funding that would probably have had to come from their budget. As Ireland's foremost maritime historian has shown, in 1923 Irish fishermen were entitled to expect the implementation of a national fishing policy that would utilise the country's natural resources and provide an acceptable standard of living for thousands of fishermen and their families.[120] They got nothing like it. The importance of fishing was downgraded even more, shuffling as appendages between the

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[117] Minutes of CID sub-committee on the Irish treaty, 13 July 1926 (TNA, CAB 16/70).
[118] Minutes of CID sub-committee meeting on the Irish treaty, 13 July 1926 (TNA, CAB 16/70).
[119] G.G. Whiskard to D. O'Hegarty, 4 Feb. 1927 (MA, CDA/18; CDA 2/18).
[120] John de Courcey, *Ireland's sea fisheries: a history* (Dublin, 1981), pp 93-6.

Department of Lands and the Department of Agriculture, and going into a steady decline over decades.

In a Dáil debate on 2 June 1936 the TD for Donegal, James Dillon, complained about government neglect of the fishing industry, citing how herring that had traditionally been caught by Donegal trawlers and cured locally was now being caught by British trawlers and cured in Derry before onward shipment to Germany; and how fish curers in search of work were having to travel to Derry.[121]

Unfortunately, the government had no interest in maritime affairs, even though the country was surrounded by sea, and it was quite content for the fishing fleets of other countries to take whatever quantity of fish they wished from Irish waters. The government was focused on farming, and was beholden to farmers. Fishermen, the sea and what it could offer were of little consequence.

For the first ten years after independence, Irish Free State governments did little to regain control over the treaty ports. There were more important matters that demanded priority. New structures of government had to be established; the state's serious financial problems had to be resolved; the most acute security problem that demanded attention was internal security. The country's sovereignty was compromised as long as Britain retained naval bases in it, but this was an issue that could be dealt with in the longer term when the country's administration stabilised. In the meantime, the country could enjoy the luxury of having the Royal Navy provide its maritime defence at no cost. Nevertheless, by refusing to take responsibility for any part of its own maritime defences, in co-operation with the Royal Navy, the government missed an opportunity of using the conference to make some gains that would have been of long-term benefit to the country. The purpose of the conference was limited (to finding a way in which the Irish Free State could share in coastal defence) and this was an open opportunity to gain expertise in an area in which the state had little—a maritime marine.

The government concentrated on recovering the ports mainly for ideological reasons. The departure of British troops and the return of the ports

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[121] James Dillon, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lxii, cols 1523-27, 2 June 1936.

to the Irish Free State would have been powerful in political terms, and this was a strong stimulus. There was little political capital to be gained by being seen to cooperate with the Royal Navy, to whatever purpose. Nevertheless, the government's efforts in pursuing the opportunity offered by the conference could not be described as anything more than half-hearted, so the moment was lost.

The impetus to regain control of the ports did not commence again until thirteen years after independence, and it came about not just because of rising nationalism but because of political change in Europe. The prospect of another war in Europe highlighted how British control of the ports exposed how Ireland's claim to neutrality was undermined.

The government was prepared to take over the forts on the basis of the costs prepared by the Department of Defence, but the department admitted that its figures were produced without having the full facts of exactly what was involved, and with the added comment that they could be too low. The Department of Finance rejected the figures without having any facts of what would have been involved, and then pressurised Defence to reduce them further. In addition, the estimated costs made no provision for renovating and upgrading the facilities which were accepted as being sub-standard. For ideological reasons the government was prepared to take on the uncertain financial burden of the forts, and also for ideological reasons it would not contemplate sharing naval defence with Britain even for a limited period.

8. The Royal Navy in Irish territorial waters

After their extensive activities during the Civil War, the destroyers of the Royal Navy settled down to the quiet existence of a peacetime navy. One of the peacetime activities in which the navy was engaged was for one of its ships, or squadron of ships, to make courtesy calls to friendly countries around the world, with a preponderance of the visits to the dominions. It was a welcome diversion to regular exercises at sea. Courtesy visits were popular with officers and ratings because of the social activities that were invariably organised for the duration of the visit, which usually lasted a week. The Dominions Office also favoured these visits because it believed that the flag-waving and ceremonial that attended them helped in cementing bonds between the countries. Courtesy visits were a feature of life in Ireland until the outbreak of war in 1914, but after independence in 1922 the practice was not resurrected. The visits were formal affairs that were arranged in advance through the normal diplomatic channels and they had an arranged programme that included receptions both ashore and on board, invitations to which were covered by protocol. Courtesy visits were quite different to the routine calls to ports around the country made by the destroyers based in Irish waters while they were on patrol. These were working visits during which training and exercises would be carried out, usually with the cooperation of the port garrison, and recreational activities were informal and confined to the general area of the ports.

In 1926, the Dominions Secretary, Leo Amery, decided that the time was ripe to revive the practice of courtesy visits to Ireland so he raised the matter with the CID while preparing for the planned conference with the Irish government to review Irish coastal defence. A letter to Cosgrave was drafted but before it could be sent, the Admiralty informed Amery that it could not organise a visit during 1926.[1] The subject was not raised at the conference and it was decided to hold it over until the following year.

The Admiralty was presented with the perfect opportunity of revisiting the subject in March 1927 when they received a letter from the Cobh Tourist and Development Association asking for 'some of your warships to visit

[1] Mark Antrobus, Dominions Office, to Fry, Admiralty, 11 Aug. 1926 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).

Queenstown' and assuring them of a warm welcome.[2] This request illustrates how the relationship between the Royal Navy and the people of Cobh remained warm even after five years of independence. It is notable that this happened in Cork, a republican county during the revolutionary period between 1916 and 1923,[3] and described by one writer as 'the most violent area in the country during this period'.[4]

The head of the Department of Naval Intelligence, Alan Hotham, was unenthusiastic and was of the view that the C-in-C, Atlantic Fleet, should suit himself entirely on the invitation because it was 'imbued with financial rather than patriotic motives'.[5] However, his colleague in the Admiralty, M.E. Marrack, the Head of 'M'[Military] Branch, took a more pragmatic view. He was aware of the Dominions Office's unsuccessful attempt to arrange a visit the previous year so he referred the letter to them, suggesting that the request should be pursued.[6] Amery was delighted that an opportunity had arisen that would allow him to approach the Irish Free State government, so he wrote to Cosgrave shortly afterwards.[7] Cosgrave replied that he and his colleagues would be very glad to host such a visit but felt that the timing was not right because of the opposition that still existed in the country towards the treaty, and the fear that 'a small section of that minority which carries this feeling so far as to be prepared to resort to violence.'[8] He concluded by asking Amery not to accede to Cobh's request and saying that he would reconsider the matter the following year.

This was to be the tenor of responses to similar requests over the next few years: Cosgrave, Desmond FitzGerald, the Minister for Defence, and Timothy Smiddy, the High Commissioner in London, all expressing either government or personal views that such visits would be welcome, but that the timing was not right and that perhaps the following year would be better. The government stance on the matter is understandable. It wanted to remain on

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[2] R.Dillon, secretary, to Admiralty, 9 Mar. 1927 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).
[3] Peter Hart, *The IRA and its enemies: violence and community in Cork, 1916-1923* (Dublin, 1998).
[4] Arthur Mitchell. Review of Peter Hart, 'The IRA and its enemies 1916-1923', in *History Ireland* , ii, no. 2 (Summer, 1999), pp 48-50.
[5] Hotham, Admiralty, memorandum 23 Mar. 1927 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).
[6] Marrack to Batterbee, 18 May 1927 (NAI, S 5428A).
[7] Amery to Cosgrave, 13 Apr. 1927 (NAI, S5428A).
[8] Cosgrave to Amery, 18 May 1927, (NAI, S5428A).

good terms with the British government and not cause any unnecessary offence by outright refusal, while, on the other hand, recognising that there remained in the country a sizeable republican element that was antagonistic to the treaty and might use the occasion of a formal naval visit to create an international incident. The image of senior Irish government ministers on friendly terms and sharing hospitality with senior English naval officers would not have had universal appeal throughout the country. Cosgrave also cited the forthcoming general election as a reason for a visit not to take place in 1927, no doubt recognising that a fellow politician would accept it as a well-founded reason not to proceed.[9] He had reason to be cautious. De Valera's new party, which had been formed only the previous year, won forty four seats to Cumann na nGaedheal's forty seven in the election, almost eliminating Sinn Féin in the process and becoming the second largest party in the Dáil.

In addition to these concerns, both governments shared an unease about the risk of attack on the treaty ports by dissidents. The shock of the 'Cobh Outrage' as it became known, in 1924 in which twenty three British soldiers and civilians were wounded and one was killed remained in the public mind.[10] The unease was also shared by the British military, as evidenced by a 1925 report following an inspection of the ports' defences by Lt-Col. H. Crerar that he carried out for the War Office. One of Crerar's conclusions was that the meagre defence system that existed was concentrated on repelling an attack by sea, whereas the troops were concerned with the more immediate problem of being prepared for an attack from land by 'hostile elements among the surrounding population'.[11] An attack on one of the forts, even an unsuccessful one, would have generated much unwanted publicity, and even a partially successful one would have shown up the inherent weakness in the landward defences of the forts.

Whitehall returned to the matter later that year. At a meeting of the CID sub-committee on the Irish treaty in November 1927, the question of the Irish Free State government taking on more responsibility for its coastal defence was discussed. The committee agreed and as a step towards persuading the

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[9] Ibid.
[10] This incident is covered in detail in chapter 6.
[11] Lt-Col. H. Crerar, 'Report on Irish coastal defences', 30 June 1925 (TNA, WO 35/5315).

Irish government to undertaking this, Sir Henry Batterbee, of the Dominions Office, suggested arranging for a squadron of cruisers or battleships to pay prolonged visits to Irish ports, and suggested that the time might be ripe to approach the government now that the elections were over.[12]

The opportunity for Batterbee to pursue his own suggestion came the following month when Desmond FitzGerald visited the Dominions Office in Whitehall. FitzGerald casually expressed an interest in warships during conversation, which led to Batterbee inviting him aboard one at some suitable time. FitzGerald replied that he would be very happy to receive such an invitation and it was agreed that Batterbee would set the wheels in motion.[13] The plan was to invite FitzGerald to spend some time aboard HMS *Nelson*, the flagship of Vice Admiral Brand, C-in-C, Atlantic Fleet, and to ask him about a naval visit while he was enjoying Brand's hospitality. The plan never materialised, mainly because of FitzGerald's absence in the USA. The matter ran on for the rest of the year without resolution despite the Admiralty continually urging the Dominions Office to make progress with the arrangements.

It was raised again in April 1929 when Vice Admiral Brand again asked for a small unit of the Atlantic Fleet to be permitted to visit Queenstown.[14] Timothy Smiddy, who had recently been appointed High Commissioner, expressed his personal support for a visit but said that he needed to consult Dublin before giving assent. He added a comment that revealed Dublin's thinking on the whole subject of visits and for its procrastination in making a final decision. Smiddy told Batterbee that although the Irish Free State government still felt that the time was not yet ripe for a friendly visit, if he heard nothing from Dublin within a week that he would presume that the visit could proceed and that he believed 'the Free State government would not object so long as they were not officially consulted.'[15] No reply was received within a week and Brand was informed that he could proceed with arrangements for a visit. In fact, Dublin did object, and Smiddy was informed

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[12] Batterbee, minutes of CID sub-committee on the Irish treaty, 3 Nov. 1927 (TNA, CAB 16/70).
[13] Batterbee to Flint, Admiralty, 12 Dec. 1927 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).
[14] Brand to Admiralty, 12 Apr. 1929 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).
[15] Note of interview between Batterbee and Smiddy on 29 Apr. 1929 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).

that the government would prefer the visit not to take place. [16] Accordingly, Smiddy implored Amery to 'use his best endeavours' to prevent any ships visiting Queenstown, and the visit was called off.[17]

Coincidentally, while these exchanges were going on, Batterbee informed Sean Murphy of the Dept. of External Affairs that the Lord Mayor of Cork had extended an invitation to the commander and officers of a destroyer in Cobh to attend a dance, in uniform, in return for their earlier hospitality on board the destroyer. Permission to issue this invitation was also refused,[18] despite Royal Navy uniforms being a familiar sight in the area and a destroyer being stationed at Cobh.

Nevertheless when Cdr. H.M. Hughes, the SNO in Irish Waters, suggested visiting Kingstown in HMS *Seawolf* for the week of the Dublin Horse Show in August 1929, while on a routine patrol from Cobh, he was promptly given permission (HMS Seawolf was based in Cobh at the time).[19] The visit took place and it was hugely successful, without the Irish government being consulted on anything. Hughes simply wrote to the Harbour Master at Kingstown seeking a berth for his ship, had a meeting with the president of the Royal Dublin Society, and the arrangements were made.[20] Some extracts from Hughes' report give an indication of the degree of sentiment that remained, at least in parts of Dublin, for *l'ancien regime*:

> The harbour was full of yachts and Kingstown was gaily decorated, with a British Legion Fair on the front.
> The Union Jack was noticeable among the flags...there were quite a number of people on the breakwater watching my arrival and boats immediately came off with invitations from all the Yacht Clubs for the officers to become Honorary Members.
> The liberty men were given an enthusiastic welcome on shore, the following incident being an example:- A party of them were taken to a dancing place and allowed in free. On their arrival the band stopped, three cheers were given for the British Navy, and 'God save the King' played.
> In most places the men were not allowed to pay for drinks and Guinness Brewery was particularly hospitable...

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[16] Extract of minutes of cabinet meeting, 14 May 1929, *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, iii , no.208.
[17] P.E.Marrack, Admiralty memorandum, 15 May 1929 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).
[18] T.J. Kiernan, Sec. President's Office to Sean Murphy, Dept. Ext. Affairs, 15 May 1929 (NAI, S 5428A).
[19] Cdr H.M. Hughes to C-in-C, Plymouth, 11 July 1929 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).
[20] Cdr H.M. Hughes to C-in-C, Plymouth, 13 Sept. 1929 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).

> I received 'reserved seat' tickets for the officers from a Mr. Myerscough of Dundrum and later further tickets admitting officers free to everything connected with the Horse Show from the Royal Dublin Society; also instructions for the men to get in free. They were given seats in a stand.
> A large number of private invitations were also received and we were all made Honorary Members of all the large clubs in Dublin...
> I allowed the ship to be open to visitors in the Dog Watches and large numbers of came aboard daily. It is estimated that 1,000 people visited the ship on the last day (Friday)...
> On Thursday there was a Free State Army Ball in Dublin – tickets 20/- but as we were not officially invited, we attended a large dinner party and dance in Bray instead. I learnt afterwards that 'The King' was played as well as the 'Soldiers' Song' at the finish...
> On Friday...in the evening there was a large Ball at the Plaza in Dublin arranged by the British Legion to which we were officially invited free. About 2,000 people were present including Foreign and Free State Army officers in uniform. We also went in uniform. Medals and decorations were worn by remainder. We had a wonderful reception and looked after by everyone... I was informed by General Hickey (President) that the Governor General had been asked to be present but would not accept. Many other Free State officials were however present.[21]

The Dublin Horse Show was the outstanding social event in Ireland at the time and it received wide coverage in the national press. The *Irish Times* had the most comprehensive coverage, carrying photographs of both jumping and social events, reports of *Seawolf's* presence and a photograph of its officers aboard ship.[22] The newspaper's report, welcoming the *Seawolf* made a noteworthy point that it had been seven years since a British warship, had last appeared in Kingstown on 'that never to be forgotten day when Admiral Fox took Sir Nevil Macready back to England'.[23] The *Irish Independent's* coverage made no mention of *Seawolf's* presence. There was a strong international military presence at the show, with teams of army officers from seven countries represented. However, while all the officers were entertained at functions (General Dawes, the senior British army officer, and his wife were the Governor General's guests at one function)[24] the naval officers were not part of any formal function organised by an Irish Free State body. Their

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[21] Report of HMS *Seawolf* to C-in-C, Plymouth, 14 Aug. 1929 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).
[22] *Irish Times*, 7 Aug. 1929.
[23] *Irish Times* 6 Aug. 1929.
[24] *Irish Independent*, 9 Aug. 1929.

absence from the inaugural Army Benevolent Fund dance is especially notable, particularly as all British army officers who were in Dublin attended it as guests. The naval officers were guests at the British Legion dance the following night, which was attended by Desmond FitzGerald and other government officials, although the Governor General declined his invitation.[25]

While the Irish government's stance on formal visits by Royal Navy ships is understandable, this episode at the Horse Show indicates a degree of overcautiousness on its part. It was happy to formally accommodate the British army very publicly at the most prominent social event of the year without fear of consequences while, at the same time, it would not accommodate the Royal Navy. While the government may have been justified in fearing a republican response towards British troops being entertained as guests in the country, it is more likely that any residual antagonism that remained in the country towards those forces would have been directed against the British army rather than the Royal Navy.

Both the Admiralty and the War Office were delighted with the success of the visit and the Admiralty proposed a follow-up visit during the summer of 1930, but they became a little carried away in their enthusiasm. The Admiralty suggested that the Irish government be approached about agreeing to the four battleships that comprised the Second Battle Squadron of the Atlantic Fleet visiting Lough Foyle, Lough Swilly, Blacksod Bay, Galway Bay, Foynes, and Bantry Bay.[26] The Dominions Office gave overt support to the idea but, in the most diplomatic terms, questioned whether political sentiment throughout the country would welcome such an ambitious programme, and they reminded the Admiralty about the difficulties of arranging visits with the Irish government on previous occasions.[27] It was decided that Smiddy be approached informally to ascertain the feelings in Dublin. Smiddy was spoken to and, after consultation in Dublin, he advised Batterbee that such a visit was considered to be 'premature', even though 'the government and ninety percent of the population would warmly welcome it'.[28]

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[25] *Irish Times*, 9 Aug. and 10 Aug. 1929.
[26] Chatfield to Admiralty, 31 Jan. 1930 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).
[27] Dominions Secretary to First Lord of the Admiralty, 10 Mar. 1930 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).
[28] Batterbee to Alexander, 20 Mar. 1930 (DO 35/398/3).

Some weeks later a notice appeared in the local press that HMS *Tiger* was due to visit Buncrana, on the east coast of Lough Swilly, in June. This prompted an *ad hoc* committee from Rathmullan, on the west side, to write to the Admiralty asking for *Tiger* to pay them a visit where the ship and crew would receive a warm welcome.[29] The signatories to the letter included local businessmen and the local Catholic parish priest and Church of Ireland rector. This request instigated an extraordinary amount of correspondence over the following few months between the Admiralty, the Dominions Office, and to a lesser extent the Department of External Affairs, about the visit to Buncrana and about other visits. Problems started when the Admiralty, in what can only be described as a fit of pique, decided that *Tiger* would not now make such a visit because of the cancellation of its proposal to send its battle squadron. However, the Admiralty then became concerned that because *Tiger's* proposed visit had already appeared in the press, it would now give the impression that the cancellation would 'draw special attention to the fact that visits of H.M. ships to the Irish Free State are now considered undesirable'. This led to further representations to Smiddy to see what could be done, resulting in Smiddy advising the Admiralty that the Irish government saw no objection to *Tiger* visiting Buncrana.[30] At this time the Irish government had been in communication with the Dominions Office about the possibility of the Minister for Defence sending Irish Aviation Corps officers to England for training with the RAF, so Smiddy had an additional reason for being cooperative.[31]

However, Walshe's letter to Batterbee, subsequent to Smiddy informing the Admiralty of his government's decision on the visit, was less than enthusiastic, but it did not specifically refuse permission. Walshe reiterated some of the difficulties that the visit could generate, and that while he welcomed the visit he could not give an assurance that 'certain persons evilly disposed towards them will not use the occasion for the purpose of creating

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[29] Letter to Admiralty 14 Apr. 1930 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).
[30] Barnes, Admiralty, to Batterbee, 7 Apr. 1930; Cotton, Admiralty, to Batterbee, 28 Apr. 1930; Admiralty memorandum, 28 Apr. 1930 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).
[31] Smiddy, confidential report to Walshe 28 Feb. 1930, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, iii, pp 511-13.

incidents calculated to embroil them with your Government'.[32] The letter was taken as confirmation for the visit to proceed and arrangements were put in place, but with the proviso that there be no official entertainments at either Buncrana or Londonderry.[33] The proviso had been added because of First Sea Lord Chatfield's concern that the visit to Buncrana could lead to Buncrana being used as a base from which officers could be expected to receive offers of hospitality from across the border, and the possibility of creating an incident, especially as a division of destroyers was due to call to Londonderry also in July.[34] He wanted to ensure that the occasion be not marred in any way. Another consequence of Chatfield's letter was that the visit of destroyers to Londonderry was subsequently cancelled.[35]

Tiger's visit went ahead on 24 June, with its commander Captain A. Bedford under orders that it was to be an informal affair with no official invitations accepted or offered. The Dominions Office had not wanted the press to draw attention to the visit,[36] but unfortunately for them, on 24 June *The Times* printed a list of H.M. ships' activities for the coming weeks (that could only have been issued by the Admiralty), and included a statement that *Tiger* was in Buncrana.[37] *The Times* was asked to insert a correction of the statement, which it did the following day stating that *Tiger* had left for Buncrana on 23 June.[38] So, instead of leaving *The Times'* original statement stand, the Admiralty ensured that there was advance publicity for the visit.

Despite the restrictions, *Tiger* arrived in Buncrana as arranged, where it was welcomed by Major J.V. Joyce of the National Army. Captain Bedford was again welcomed ashore the following day by Major Joyce and a Mr Porter, who was chairman of the UDC and owner of the Lough Swilly Hotel. Bedford reported that Porter, a strong republican, was torn between not wanting to show too much enthusiasm for the visit but at the same time was anxious not to do something that would keep *Tiger's* officers and men away from his hotel.

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[32] Walshe to Batterbee, 10 May 1930 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).
[33] Dominions Office memorandum, 29 May 1930 (TNA, DO 35/398/3).
[34] Chatfield to Alexander, 14 May 1930 (TNA, DO 35/398/3).
[35] Batterbee, Dominions Office, minute 29 May 1930 (TNA, DO 35/398/3).
[36] Head of 'M' Branch [Marrack] minute, 27 June 1930 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).
[37] *The Times*, 24 June 1930.
[38] Ibid.

Captain Bedford's report gives a comprehensive account of activities for the week.[39]

On the following day Major Joyce, Col. McLoughlin and other Irish army officers were entertained to lunch aboard ship. This was reciprocated the next day when all twelve of *Tiger's* officers were entertained by the army officers at Rosapenna Hotel, about sixty miles away, where they played golf before and after lunch. Later that evening, detachments from the artillery garrison, Civic Guards, and the Irish Free State army (about seventy NCOs in total) were entertained on board *Tiger.*[40]

On Saturday 28th, a dance was held onboard to which about 150 guests from the neighbourhood were invited. No written invitations had been sent to guests: all were invited verbally by the ship's officers. The Irish army officers attended in uniform, as did British officers of the garrison. On the same afternoon a football match was played between the ship's company and Celtic F.C. at Buncrana, and another team from the ship's company beat a team of Gardaí in a tug-of war contest. Later that evening, the ship's petty officers and men organised a very successful dance on the upper deck of the ship to which locals were invited.[41]

During the week the general public was welcome on board the ship, there were dances in Buncrana every evening that attracted full houses, and on two afternoons the ladies of Buncrana arranged 'entertainments' ashore for the sailors.[42]

The visits and the activities involved with it were well reported by the *Londonderry Sentinel* and included impressive photographs of the ship.[43] However, the two other popular newspapers, the *Derry Journal* and the *Donegal Democrat* carried no account of the visit, evidence that the visit did not have the universal support of the people. The *Derry Journal* did carry an article the following week in which it denounced the visit in the strongest terms, and under a heading 'Shoneenism in the open', described the visit as proof that 'in the area that the Free State government controls the Imperial

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[39] Capt. A. Bedford, 'Visit to Buncrana, report of proceedings', 11 July 1930 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] *Londonderry Sentinel*, 26 June 1930 .

idea is being sedulously fostered among the "natives"' and that it was 'flaunting British Imperialism in the teeth of Irish nationalism'.[44] The writer was also very disturbed at what he described as 'the disgusting scenes that met my gaze' and that he could 'not refrain from blushing for the womanhood that, I suppose, would still have the presumption to call itself Irish.' He was even more upset at 'Irish women and girls—under proper supervision, of course—performing negro dances in the arms of navymen, and "cuddling" in their embraces'.[45]

The whole tone of the article was overblown, but it did show that there was significant republican sentiment in the country, and that Cosgrave was right to be conscious of it and not to provoke it unnecessarily by giving official sanction for imperial flag-waving exercises. Nevertheless, the *Journal's* article must have had some effect in Whitehall and caused some people in the Admiralty to take note that real opposition to Royal Navy activity did exist. An evaluation of *Tiger's* visit the following year by the Department of Naval Intelligence (DNI) concluded that 'The *Tiger's* visit to Buncrana showed that such visits have Empire cementing results, but the press criticisms of the occasion indicate that Irish opinion is very confused'.[46]

However, this does not detract from the overall success that the six-day visit proved to be. It generated enormous local interest, was enjoyed by all, and any fears of republican activities marring the occasion turned out to be groundless. The interaction between the ship's company and the locals was particularly amicable, and Captain Bedford especially commended the Gardaí Síochána for their cooperation, not least for their assistance in finding accommodation for sailors who stayed ashore when they could.[47]

The prospect of another visit to the Dublin Horse Show in August 1930 was planned for *Seawolf* and it was intended that this would also be done within the ship's regular patrol, without seeking permission from the Irish Free State government. It was normal for the destroyers in Irish waters to call into Irish ports as part of their normal patrol, doing no more than contacting the local harbour master in advance for a berth for the ship—which is what

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[44] *Derry Journal*, 2 July 1930.
[45] Ibid.
[46] DNI memorandum, 14 Apr. 1931 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).
[47] Bedford, 'Report or proceedings', 11 July 1930 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).

Seawolf's commander had done in Kingstown the previous year. However, Commander Hughes, in command of *Seawolf*, was overheard in Cobh saying that he would be visiting Dublin the following week with his ship in time for the Horse Show. This information was passed to the government, so Smiddy was instructed to tell the Dominions Office to cancel the visit.[48] The visit was cancelled, much to the annoyance of the Admiralty. A.V. Alexander, the First Lord of the Admiralty, wrote to J.H. Thomas, the Dominions Secretary, expressing his dissatisfaction with the decision and of the fact that he was quite unaware of the reasons for the Irish Free State to ask for cancellation, especially as 'visits are constantly being paid by the destroyers in Irish waters to Free State ports, and arrangements for these are made without any formal intimation to the Free State government.'[49] To emphasise his point, Alexander enclosed a list of ports that had been visited by destroyers in the first seven months of 1930:

Castlehaven	by *Seawolf*	11-14 July
Glandore	by *Seawolf*	14-15 July
Kilrush	by *Seawolf*	4 – 7 July
Foynes	by *Seawolf*	7 – 8 July
Bantry	by *Seawolf*	13-15 March
Youghal	by *Scythe*	26-28 June
Waterford	by *Scythe*	28 June – 1 July
Killary	by *Scythe*	14-15 July
Galway	by *Scythe*	11-14 July
Valentia	by *Scythe*	15-16 July
Bantry	by *Scythe*	27 February – 4 March

These visits were reported by the Irish Times at the end of July.[50] All of the visits had taken place without any problems or disturbances, and without the Irish government being informed in advance, although it is most unlikely that the government was ignorant of any of the visits, and raised no objection to any of them. However, once the government was warned in advance of *Seawolf's* visit to Dublin, albeit indirectly, it took prompt action to see that it

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[48] Admiralty minutes, 7 Aug.1930 (TNA, DO 35/398/3).
[49] Alexander to Thomas, 18 Sept. 1930 (TNA, DO 35/398/3).
[50] *Irish Times*, 18 July 1930.

did not happen. There is little evidence to suggest that the Irish government was more concerned about visits to Dublin than to other ports around the country, although visits to Dublin, especially during Horse Show week would have been more high profile than visits elsewhere, thus making them more attractive targets for activists seeking publicity.

What emerges from this is that activities with British sailors that involved degrees of formal ceremony were acceptable within a community when arranged locally, but whenever permission was sought from the Irish government it was not forthcoming.

The *Seawolf* incident raised concerns in the Admiralty that the Irish Free State's actions might lead to a situation where all future visits to Irish ports would require clearance in advance from the government.[51] The Dominions Office did not give the Admiralty any comfort in its reply about its concern. Geoffrey Whiskard wrote pointing out that there was 'an inconsistency' in Alexander's statement in his letter that visits were made to Irish Free State ports without any formal intimation to the Irish Free State government, and an earlier statement made by Leo Amery on 8 April 1927 to W.T. Cosgrave that when H.M. ships visit other dominions 'the usual practice on such occasions is that the naval authorities send prior information direct to the appropriate Dominion authority concerned'.[52] Whiskard concluded by suggesting that Desmond FitzGerald be spoken to informally at the forthcoming imperial conference about the possibility of a visit by a ship during next year's Horse Show. He also asked Marrack to let him know precisely where the Admiralty stood on the matter of visits to other dominions. Marrack gave a detailed response that could be considered to be an exercise in semantics. In essence, his argument was that while the Admiralty did send information in advance of visits to other dominions this was not to be considered to be asking for permission: 'It is merely a message sent for the information of the Dominion authorities as an act of courtesy.'[53] In other words, the Admiralty considered that it was their right to send ships to any dominion without the permission of the country's government. The Admiralty

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[51] Alexander to Thomas 18 Sept. 1930 (TNA, DO 35/398/3).
[52] Whiskard to Marrack, 'M' Branch, 2 Oct.1930 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).
[53] Marrack to Whiskard, 9 Oct. 1930 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).

considered the case of the two destroyers in Irish waters somewhat differently in that they regularly patrolled in the waters, and that by contacting the local harbour masters the ships' commanders were fulfilling the normal procedure of informing 'the appropriate Dominion authority concerned'.[54]

By this time the prospects of Cosgrave and his party were coming under increasing political pressure at home. De Valera had formed his new party, Fianna Fáil, in 1926 and it became extraordinarily popular within a year to the extent of winning forty four seats in the 1927 general election, reducing Cumann na nGaedheal's share of the vote and leaving Sinn Féin with just five seats, almost wiping it out in the process. In August de Valera led his party into the Dáil for the first time, after signing the book containing the oath, salving his conscience by covering the words of the oath as he signed. Cosgrave called another general election almost immediately, but was able to form a majority only by entering an alliance with other parties. But while he did form a government, and continued as president, Cosgrave 'retreated psychologically into opposition as Fianna Fáil now stalked Cumann na nGaedheal and hunter became hunted.'[55] Republican sentiment continued to grow in 1930 and 1931 to the extent that the IRA carried out two murders in the summer of 1931, including that of a garda superintendent.

It was in this political situation that the Admiralty and the Dominions Office continued to press for more naval visits and, flushed with the success of the visit to Buncrana, and without having consideration for Cosgrave's plight, they again raised the prospect of a battleship or cruiser visiting Kingstown during Horse Show week in August 1931. After personal communications with P.J. McGilligan, who was now minister for External Affairs, and J.P. Walshe, followed by exchanges of letters between London and Dublin, McGilligan agreed to a one-day visit by one destroyer.[56] The Dominions Office was happy to agree to this but the Admiralty took offence at the offer, believing that 'such a visit would be undignified and this limitation implies that our men would

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[54] Ibid.
[55] Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, p. 155.
[56] Admiralty memorandum, 31 Mar. 1931 (TNA, DO 35/398/3).

not be welcome ashore.'[57] Despite strong pleas from the Dominions Office, the Admiralty refused to change its mind and the visit did not take place.

However, the Admiralty did not give up, and it proposed to the Dominions Office later that the possibility be explored of sending a ship to Dublin for the Horse Show in 1932 and ordered its two destroyers in Irish waters to continue to pay informal visits to ports around the country.[58] In all of the verbal and written communications between Dublin and London, the tone adopted by Irish officials and politicians was very conciliatory, in which it was invariably made clear that any naval visits would always be welcome, and that any government decisions to defer requests for visits were only because of a fear that an unruly minority would seek to disrupt the occasion. It would appear that neither the Dominions Office nor Admiralty were able to discern that the Irish Free State government really did not want such visits to take place at all, and would prefer if they did not receive requests for them. However, the Admiralty continued to receive requests for visits, mainly inspired by commercial reasons. Cork UDC wrote in April 1931 and asked for a flotilla of ships to visit during the summer months,[59] but the matter was not pursued at government level.

During the same period there was considerable activity in the Bantry Bay area aimed at getting the Royal Navy to pay a visit. In March 1931 at a public meeting in Castletownbere a resolution was adopted by the people, when they heard a rumour that the Royal Navy was planning for some of its ships to visit to the town, that any such visits 'will be heartily appreciated...and we assure the officers and men of the Navy that the people will give them a very hearty welcome.'[60] There was such eagerness for the visit that a second public meeting was held in Bantry two days later at which it was agreed that another letter be sent to Desmond FitzGerald asking him to formally extend an invitation to the Admiralty.[61]

The Berehaven Improvement Committee supported the move and also wrote to FitzGerald urging the government not to place any obstacles in the

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[57] W.H. Hancock to C.W. Dixon, 3 June 1931 (TNA, DO 35/398/3).
[58] Hancock to Dixon, 1 May 1931 (TNA, DO 35/398/3).
[59] A.J. Powell, Town Clerk, to Admiralty, 14 Apr. 1931 (TNA, ADM 116/1525).
[60] D. Harrington, chairman, to Desmond FitzGerald, Minister for External Affairs 25 Mar. 1931 (NAI, GR/1598); resolution of public meeting in Bantry, 25 Mar. 1931 (NAI, S 5428A).
[61] R. Kelly PC to Minister for External Affairs' 25 Mar. 1931 (NAI, GR/1598).

way of any proposed visit.[62] The committee's support was motivated by the commercial possibilities of a visit, and they made the point that the business of the town 'has always been supplemented by...the visits of fleets of warships to this harbour' in addition to mackerel fishing that it regretted had been in serious decline for many years. The letters and resolutions were simply acknowledged by the department and no further action was taken. There is no record of correspondence between External Affairs and the Admiralty but copies of the resolutions adopted in Castletownbere reached Admiralty files.[63] The *Irish Times* reported on the proposed visit to Bantry Bay and about the welcome it would receive but was obliged to issue a statement two days later explaining that no visit had been arranged; such visits could only take place if arranged by the Irish Free State 'Ministry[sic] of Defence', and that the 'ministry' had not made any arrangements for a visit.[64]

The Admiralty also received a request for ships to visit Galway, where routine, but irregular, calls were made by destroyers on patrol. However, this request was from Captain Charles Stewart, a retired naval officer. He thought it would be a good idea for a fleet of battleships to winter in Galway Bay 'as it would bring more money to the district'.[65] To make it more appealing to the Admiralty, he said that Captain R. Daly was resigning his position of Master of Foxhounds and that 'if a naval officer would take it over he could live ashore and go out on his days off'. Stewart also added that there was 'first rate sporting country' in the area and 'good salmon fishing and shooting' in the 10,000 acres of Kylemore Abbey 'where I stop'. He concluded by advising the Admiralty that 'a gun boat in Galway Harbour on a friendly visit would not be out of place'.[66] There is no record of the Admiralty's reply.

The spread of republicanism was fully evident in 1932 when Fianna Fáil was successful in the February general election, and building on this success by calling, and winning, another election eleven months later with an increased majority. It was not only republican rhetoric and anti-British attitudes that gave Fianna Fáil its success: the party had built up a ready

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[62] R. O'Sullivan to Desmond FitzGerald, 25 Mar. 1931 (NAI, GR/1598).
[63] Copies of resolutions, 25 Mar. 1931 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).
[64] *Irish Times*, 30 Mar. 1931; 2 Apr. 1931.
[65] Capt. Charles Stewart to Admiralty, 23 Mar. 1931 (TNA, ADM 116/2525).
[66] Ibid.

support from working-class voters—a constituency that had been neglected by Cosgrave and his party—that provided a solid and committed base for the party. Cumann na nGaedheal, through its neglect of these voters, through other poor political decisions, and not least the consequences of the Great Depression, contributed to de Valera's success.

The Admiralty's response to the new situation in Ireland was to review the activities of its two destroyers in Irish waters, and instead of their normal procedure of planning their routine patrols independently and notifying only local harbour masters in advance of arrivals, they sent the September programme of sailings to the Dominions Office for approval before issuing them to the SNO in Irish Waters. The itinerary included visits to Berehaven, Waterford, Cobh, and Kingstown by *Amazon,* and Berehaven, Valencia, Kilrush, and Galway by *Ambuscade.*[67] The Admiralty also recognized the possibility of having to increase the number of destroyers to support the military garrisons if the political situation deteriorated.[68] This came about three months later when Vice Admiral E. Fullerton, C-in-C, Plymouth, was ordered to ensure that a destroyer was based in Cobh and in Berehaven, with a third destroyer to be available to provide relief for leave and for maintenance, and to provide extra support to the two garrisons 'until the situation in Ireland improves'.[69] This arrangement appears to have been changed subsequently because the number of ships in Irish waters had increased by February 1933 when the SNO, Commander P.H. Calderon, reported that the Irish flotilla was at full strength of four destroyers[70] and that he had arranged for the four ships (*Amazon, Ambuscade, Vidette,* and *Venetia)* to engage in exercises at sea off the south-west coast.[71] Four destroyers continued to operate at least until the end of July 1933,[72] not always the same four, as each ship was appointed to the flotilla only for a few weeks or months before being replaced. The activities of these vessels was being tracked onshore, ant it was noted that one destroyer was 'constantly at anchor in

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[67] Barnes, Admiralty to Batterbee, 5 Aug. 1932 (TNA, DO 35/398/3).
[68] Admiralty memorandum to ISC 7 May 1932 (TNA, CAB 27/525).
[69] Admiralty to C-in-C, Plymouth, 29 Aug. 1932; Batterbee memorandum, 21 Sept. 1932 (TNA, DO 35/398/3).
[70] HMS *Amazon* confidential diary, 21 Feb. 1933 (TNA, ADM 116/2957).
[71] HMS *Amazon* confidential diary, 28 Feb. 1933 (TNA, ADM 116/2957).
[72] HMS *Crescent* confidential diary, 26-28 Jul. 1933 (TNA, ADM 116?2957).

Bantry Bay'[73] and three destroyers, *Doon*, *Ambuscade*, and *Westminster*, were patrolling in and around Cobh at the same time.[74] Detectives were also able to report that 'there would be nothing unusual in the appearance of a British submarine there [Bantry Bay]'.[75] However, by 1935 the number of destroyers had been reduced to two, and in November that year the one destroyer based in Berehaven was withdrawn, leaving just one destroyer stationed in Cobh, which subsequently made two trips per month to Berehaven.[76]

Despite the tense atmosphere that prevailed at the time, Lt-Cdr Calderon, in his final report in his command, felt able to state that 'never have relations between H.M. Navy and the Irish population around Queenstown and Berehaven been so harmonious or pleasant'[77] and that a 'farewell at-home' that he had organized on *Amazon* before his departure was attended by many local residents of Castletownbere, Bantry, and Glengarriff. A week later, though, his successor reported three warnings that had reached him of a likely attempt by the IRA to capture a Royal Navy ship in Queenstown.[78] Similar rumours, that reached the ears of the Garda, arose a few months later, this time among the British military, of an attack on their bases that resulted in extra armed sentries being posted in Forts Camden and Carlisle at the entrance to Cork harbour.[79] The Chief Superintendent in Cork also reported that on one Sunday in June 1933, visitors to Crosshaven were not allowed to park their cars on the road in the vicinity of the entrance to Fort Camden, and that local residents attending mass (at Fort Carlisle) on another day were kept waiting for a considerable time.[80] His report makes no reference to the legality of British troops prohibiting car parking outside the perimeter of the fort but as it seems to have been a once-off incident the matter was not pursued.

The new political climate was reflected in new standing orders that were drawn up in 1933 for a destroyer to be based in northern waters. This

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[73] Detective Branch HQ to Commissioner, 26 Jan. 1933 (NAI, JUS 8/434).
[74] J. O'Carroll, Chief Supt., Cork to Commissioner, 3 July 1933 (NAI, JUS 8/434).
[75] Detective Branch HQ to Commissioner, 26 Jan. 1933 (NAI, JUS 8/434).
[76] *Historical records of 26th Heavy Battery, Spike Island,* 14 Nov. 1935 (RAM, no ref.).
[77] HMS *Amazon* confidential diary, 14-27 Mar. 1933 (TNA, ADM 116/2957).
[78] HMS *Amazon* confidential diary, 28 Mar & 3 Apr. 1933 (TNA, ADM 116/2957).
[79] Chief Supt., Cork to Commissioner, 3 July 1933 (NAI, JUS 8/434).
[80] Ibid.

destroyer was to be part of the Plymouth command, along with the other two vessels, and it had orders that differed from theirs in that they gave priority to providing assistance to the garrison in Lough Swilly in the event of attack. The ship was ordered to stay within 100 miles of Lough Swilly but was not to enter or visit the harbour unless specifically ordered, and it was to take care 'not to excite comment by too frequent or lengthy visits to Northern Ireland'.[81] Landing of men was not to be permitted except in exceptional circumstances, and in the event of attack, the commander was to cooperate with the garrison commanding officer with all means at his disposal, including 'bombardment with main armament or machine guns'.[82] The Head of 'M' Branch, Admiralty, queried whether it was wise to include this phrase, or whether it was even necessary, but he was overruled by Admiral C. Little, the Deputy Chief of Naval Staff, who saw nothing wrong with the wording and who believed that Vice Admiral Fullerton should not be asked to reconsider his order.[83] However, Little was himself overruled, and was asked by Lord Chatfield to require Fullerton to reword his rather 'bellicose' order. This was done but the ship's commander was still left with the option of bombardment with his main artillery if he felt it necessary.[84] In fact, the orders were repeated in 1935 with a set of instructions on how a bombardment was to be carried out.[85]

The orders for destroyers in southern waters were somewhat different in that they were focused more against an enemy attack by sea rather than from land. The possibility of attack from land was not ignored, and commanders were to give support to the garrison if called for 'with gun and/or machine guns fire and rifle fire'.[86]

The two southern based destroyers continued their patrols during the middle and later 1930s but the Admiralty did not drop its attempts to arrange for courtesy visits. It raised the possibility of a visit to Buncrana in 1935 but this was dropped after a discussion with Dulanty, who did not favour the

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[81] 'Orders for destroyer in northern waters', 14 Aug. 1933 (TNA, ADM 178/91).
[82] Ibid.
[83] Head of 'M' branch minute, 21 Sept. 1933; Adm. Little memorandum, 30 Sept. 1933 (TNA, ADM 178/91).
[84] Little to Fullerton, 7 Oct. 1933; Fullerton to Little, 9 Oct. 1933 (TNA, ADM 178/91).
[85] Appendix IV to orders for destroyer in northern waters, 28 Feb. 1935 (TNA, ADM 178/91).
[86] Cdr G. Beck SNO, 'Cooperation in defending forts in Bere Island, 3 Mar. 1934 (TNA, ADM 178/91).

idea.[87] Yet again, in September 1937, Admiral R. Backhouse, C-in-C, Home Fleet, believed that it would be of considerable benefit to his fleet if his battleships could make occasional visits to Berehaven and Lough Swilly. He proposed that the ships could make three or four visits a year to Berehaven, and two or three visits a year to Lough Swilly, because their harbours and tides made them excellent venues for training purposes.[88] The Dominions Office consulted Dulanty on the matter, believing that he might be amenable because at that time he was trying to arrange for an Irish military band to visit Manchester in uniform for some concerts. Dulanty's advice to them was to pursue the matter in two or three months' time, although he did not say why circumstances would be more favourable then.[89] He was probably continuing the policy of saying 'no' in the gentlest way. The matter was allowed to drop and was not resurrected again.

Royal Navy destroyers patrolling the Irish coastline were a reminder of the continuing British presence in the country, but the absence of any protests against the destroyers visiting harbours and the attempts by local community bodies to have British vessels pay a visit to their towns is evidence of how well they were tolerated. While the attempts by these bodies to have large naval vessels visit their towns may have been motivated by commercial possibilities, it is clear that there was no concern by the local organisers that there would be any resentment or objection to such visits by the local people. The commercial possibilities were attractive – a thousand sailors with money to spend over several days was an attractive goal, although the reception given to naval visits to Kingstown and Buncrana dispels the idea that the motives were wholly mercenary.

Nevertheless, the government was always conscious of the nationalist undercurrent that remained and discouraged such visits whenever it could, without causing any serious offence to the British government. It was aware that any incidents provoked even by a small group of activists during naval visits could have had consequences that would have negated any benefit to be derived from the visit. With the rise in nationalist agitation in the early 1930s

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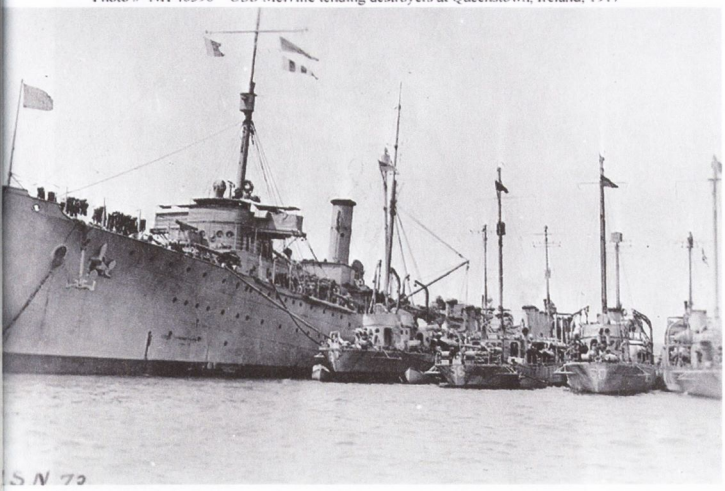
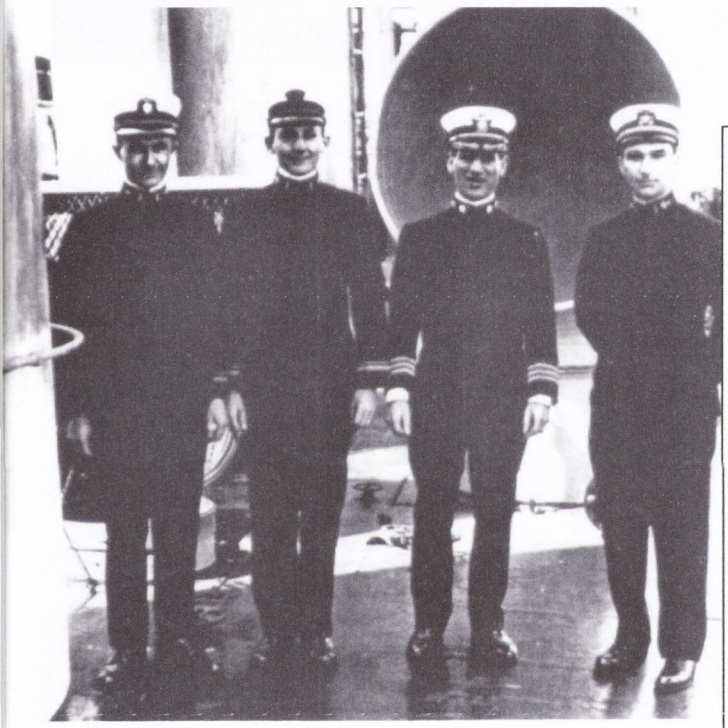
[87] Dominions Office memorandum, Oct. 1937 (TNA, DO 895/4).
[88] Backhouse to Admiralty, 22 Sept. 1937 (TNA, DO 35/895/5).
[89] Batterbee to Sir E. Harding, 2 Nov. 1937 (TNA, 35/DO 895/5).

and with de Valera's success at the polls in 1933, the likelihood of further courtesy visits evaporated, although the normal patrolling duties of just two destroyers continued.

Photo # NH 46396 USS Melville tending destroyers at Queenstown, Ireland, 1917





Above: Vice Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly, Commander-in-Chief, Coast of Ireland Command, Queenstown, 1915-1918.

Above left: USS Melville, the USN tender ship, and four of the destroyers that were based in Queenstown during the First World War.

Left: Cdr Joseph Taussig and officers of the USS Wadsworth on arrival in Queenstown on 4 May 1917. This was America's first direct engagement in the war.

(Photo: the Taussig papers in the Naval War College, Newport, R.I. by kind permission)

Bottom left: Vice Admiral William S. Sims, Commander of US Naval Forces in Europe 1917-1918.

Below: The destroyer USS *Stockton* at Queenstown 1918

Top left: Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, First Sea Lord, 1939-43

Top right: Admiral the Lord Chatfield, First Sea Lord, 1933-38.

Middle left: Sir Halford Mackinder (1861-1947), geographer and geostrategist.

Middle right: Field Marshall Viscount Gort, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, 1936-37

Bottom left: Col Dan Bryan, Director of G2, Irish Army

9 Relationships: perception and reality

The thesis to this point has considered mainly the high politics and strategic importance of the Treaty Ports but there is another aspect of the ports that merits examination: the personal relationships that existed between the naval and military personnel who were attached to the ports and the local population. To gain a broader perspective of the relationships, the chapter goes back to the First World War and looks at how the thousands of British and American sailors interacted with local people in Queenstown and Cobh at a time of great political upheaval in the country. The second part of the chapter deals with relationships between British sailors and soldiers based in or associated with the ports post-1922 when the political landscape had changed drastically.

World War 1 relationships

Even though Ireland was not a direct participant, the First World War changed the course of Irish history The war was the cause of the non-implementation of the 1914 Home Rule Act and of the split in the Irish Volunteers, following Redmond's appeal for volunteers to join the British Army, followed by the 1916 Rising and setting the scene for division within Irish society that manifested itself in the bitterness of the later Civil War.

Ireland, while being part of the United Kingdom during the war, only had an indirect involvement in it, and there were sizeable sections of the population that were opposed to the war or to participating in it at Britain's side. Yet the three ports were in the front line of the war in the Atlantic and brought thousands of sailors and troops into daily contact with local Irish people. This had an effect on the relationship that had existed between British servicemen and local Irish people in the vicinities of the ports for many years. The people living in the areas were exposed on a daily basis to Royal Navy sailors who were directly involved in the war who did not appreciate having to face an enemy every day while the local Irish could stay at home. When America declared war in April 1917, thousands of young American sailors who had no understanding of Anglo-Irish politics were also based in Queenstown and Berehaven until December 1918. They had even less understanding of why they should be fighting while Irishmen were free to walk the streets of the ports.

This relationship that existed between British and American sailors and local Irish people has not been studied in any detail, but an examination of the evidence reveals an ambivalence on both sides that reflects the differences of opinion that existed throughout Ireland towards the war.

British Army garrisons were a familiar feature of many provincial towns, were a part of the economy, and gave an opportunity for much needed employment. British Army uniforms were a familiar sight and were not the cause of any serious disturbance. However, by mid-1917, when the United States Navy had established a presence in the country, public attitudes to the war and to Britain had changed, and reaction to British and American soldiers and sailors became mixed, reflecting the ambivalent political scene that then existed. The thousands of Irishmen who joined the British forces in the early stages of the war, some of their own volition and others at Redmond's urging, is evidence of the large measure of support that existed for Britain in the early stages of the war. The initial enthusiasm for joining up rapidly declined to almost nothing by the autumn of 1915[1] as news of the war worsened and people sought to avoid the fighting in France. This phenomenon was not peculiar only to Ireland. Voluntary enlistment also fell off dramatically in England, Wales and Scotland, almost in the same proportion as in Ireland.[2]

By mid-1917 this natural reluctance had been augmented by a widespread and a more aggressive nationalism. The Easter rising of 1916 and the heavy-handed reprisals by the British military against its leaders was the catalyst for change. When the Americans arrived in May 1917, anti-British feeling was running high following the arrest of de Valera, Griffith, and one hundred and fifty others on a totally spurious German conspiracy charge, together with the constant fear that the British government would introduce conscription in Ireland. The strength of nationalist feeling was reflected in the British government's decision to exclude men in Ireland from the Military Service Act that was introduced elsewhere in the U.K. in March 1917 and in the four subsequent modifications of it. It was not until the fifth modification of the Act in April 1918 that men in Ireland could be conscripted into the army, and even then, it was never implemented. Cork county, where the U.S.

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[1] Lee, *Ireland 1912-198*, pp 23-24.
[2] Keith Jeffrey, *Ireland and the Great War* (Cambridge, 2000), pp 6-7.

Navy was based, was a Sinn Féin stronghold, despite there being a significant loyalist presence there. Paradoxically, though, Cork had a large percentage of veterans of the British armed forces and it has been estimated that of about 38,000 males living in the city, roughly 5,000 were serving overseas with the British military forces in December 1918.[3] Cork had had a strong Protestant community for many years, and even for the period 1920-1 it has been described as 'vibrant'.[4] Another account describes Queenstown as still being a unionist stronghold at the turn of the century, mainly because of the presence of British troops in the town, but when the Volunteers split in 1914 after Redmond's appeal for them to join the British army, the Volunteer unit in Queenstown defied him and sided with Eoin McNeill and Thomas MacCurtain in opposing the call.[5]

By May 1917, Vice Admiral Bayly, C-in-C, Coast of Ireland Command, in Queenstown, was well experienced in Sinn Féin activities and the strength of their local sympathies. On taking up his post in 1915 he had been briefed by the Admiralty on their spying activities in Queenstown,[6] although no evidence of what information was leaking, how it was acquired, or how sophisticated it was, was conveyed to him. The source of some of the leaking information was probably Admiralty House itself. The standard practice for communications between all Royal Navy ships in the harbour and Admiralty House on the hill was by uncoded semaphore signalling, so anyone with a knowledge of semaphore could read the messages. Bayly stopped the practice and erected a signal station on Haulbowline with which he communicated in cipher by cable.[7] He also issued an order prohibiting anyone going aboard ships unless they were in uniform or had a specific duty, so it would seem that this must have been the practice up to August 1915.

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[3] John Borgonovo, *Spies, informers and the 'Anti-Sinn Féin Society': the intelligence war in Cork city, 1920-1921* (Dublin, 2007), p. 79.
[4] Ian d'Alton, 'Keeping faith: an evocation of Cork Protestant character 1820-1920' in *Cork History and society*, eds. Patrick O'Flanagan, Cornelius Buttimer (Dublin, 1993), p. 778.
[5] Kieran McCarthy and Maj-Britt Christensen, *Cobh's contribution to the fight for Irish freedom, 1913-1990* (Cobh, 1992), pp 1-3.
[6] Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly, *Pull together: the memoirs of Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly* (London, 1939), p. 183.
[7] Ibid., p. 183.

British intelligence had been aware of IRB contacts with Germany from the early months of the war[8] and became convinced of the rumours that German U-boats were landing at locations on Ireland's western coastline, landing spies, refuelling, receiving assistance and supplies from the local population. The quality of intelligence that Whitehall was gathering locally, however, was very suspect because of the limited and ineffective involvement of British intelligence agencies in Ireland and the declining capabilities of the R.I.C.[9] Much of the intelligence was being forwarded by loyalist Irish residents and retired army officers whose reports could not be considered to be either objective or always supported by fact. The British government was becoming almost obsessed with stories of U-boats sheltering in Irish coastal inlets, but as has been shown, none of the stories and rumours of U-boats being aided has ever been supported by evidence and none of them has ever been proved.[10]

British intelligence did have one reliable source of information on the Irish republican movement's activities, and this came through the United States. The I.R.B. communicated with Germany through the German embassy in Washington which, in turn, communicated with Berlin by telegraph cable. This cable passed through British territory and all messages were deciphered and read by the Admiralty's highly secret cryptography section 'Room 40'.[11]

Sinn Féin activity had been widespread throughout Cork county, and no less so in Queenstown, as is revealed in many police reports. The County Inspector's report dated January 1917 records that in Queenstown on 1 December 1916, 'Ed. Hegarty drilled a party of thirty six young men and boys, some of whom wore part uniforms'.[12] On 9 December Hegarty is again reported as drilling men and 'Ptk. Whelan and Jas. Reid drilled a party of fifty young men and forty boys some of whom wore part uniforms'.[13] Another report claimed that 'the Volunteers carried out a rather daring route march on the night of 16 February at which they are said to have carried arms'.[14] This

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[8] McMahon, *British Spies and Irish rebels*, p. 19.
[9] Ibid., p. 18.
[10] O'Halpin, *Spying on Ireland*, pp 54-77.
[11] McMahon, *British Spies and Irish rebels*, p. 20.
[12] County Inspector's Report, 1 Jan. 1917 (NAI, CO 904/104).
[13] Ibid.
[14] County Inspector's Report, 1 Mar. 1918 (NAI, CO 904/105).

latter activity was confirmed by a Military Intelligence report that includes the comment that 'Illegal drilling continues, the numbers being much the same as last month and a march of men at night, said to have carried rifles and revolvers was reported at Queenstown'.[15]

One problem for the authorities in Queenstown was the number of known or suspected Sinn Féin activists and sympathisers employed in the dockyard. There was concern because of a number of reports of revolvers, automatic pistols, hand grenades, ammunition, detonators, and bayonets being taken from warships and stores at Haulbowline at various times.[16] These events were the cause of complaints to Bayly from various quarters about Sinn Féin members being employed in the dockyard. Bayly was handicapped in dealing with these complaints because he needed every skilled and experienced workman in the dockyard, and he could not afford to discharge any such men, even those with suspect backgrounds. He made it clear that he was not prepared to dismiss any workman unless he was convicted in a civilian court. This was his reply to the army General Officer Commanding, Cork, who complained about Sinn Féin workers in Haulbowline who were reported to be drilling.[17] He replied in similar vein to the Admiralty on 29 June 1918, stating that he had a policy of taking on only recently-discharged soldiers and sailors, and people who had been vetted by the police, but he did not dismiss any for their political opinions, and he concluded that 'if all persons of doubtful loyalty were to be discharged from Naval establishments [it] would certainly result in stopping all work in the dockyards'.[18] Bayly's argument was strong enough to convince their Lordships that he had no alternative to continuing to employ suspected and known Sinn Féin members. When the Under Secretary in Dublin Castle took up the matter following the theft of two automatic pistols in June 1918, their Lordships replied that 'it was not regarded as practical to exclude members of the movement from employment at Queenstown'. Moreover, they added that

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[15] Military intelligence report, 'Anti-Government Organisations 1882-192128', Feb. 1918 (NAI, CO904).
[16] County Inspector's report, 1 Apr. 1918 (NAI, CO 904/915); Inspector General's report, 1 Nov. 1917 (NAI, CO 904/104); Letter from Lords Justices to Under Secretary, Dublin Castle, 6 Aug. 1918 (NAI, CO 904); County Inspector's report, 1 Aug. 1917 (NAI, CO 904/104).
[17] Note from Bayly to GOC, Cork, 13 Jan. 1918 (NAI, CO 904).
[18] Bayly to Admiralty, 29 June 1918 (NAI, CO 904).

> the proportion of workmen employed in the dockyard who are attached to the Sinn Féin movement is so considerable that to make any such attachment a disqualification would...probably precipitate trouble, to say nothing of the grave inconvenience that would be entailed by the necessity of replacing the men who would be thus excluded from Admiralty employment.[19]

The Admiralty had already pointed out the undesirability of employing Sinn Féin members when they questioned Bayly in 1916 about the employment in the dockyard of Michael Leahy and James FitzGerald, both of whom had been arrested and interned in connection with the 1916 Rising but were later released.[20] Part of Bayly's somewhat vague reply was to query the reasons for their release,[21] intimating that if they had been set free they must no longer be of any danger.

These problems were not of major concern to Capt. Poinsett Pringle, the senior USN officer in Queenstown or Vice Admiral Sims, CO USN Forces in Europe, because routine repairs and overhauls of all United States Navy ships were done by the large tender USS *Melville*: the dockyard being required only when dry-dock facilities were needed. The only potentially serious conflict between the United States Navy and Sinn Féin occurred in April 1918 when a small convoy of US navy trucks travelling from Dublin to US Naval Air Stations was stopped by civilians and searched for weapons.[22]

Sinn Féin's activity in Ireland was well-known in the United States and as time passed, the general public empathy with Sinn Féin objectives decreased. One example of that awareness was an extensive report that was carried by the *New York Times* of Sinn Féin documents and letters being seized that revealed the German collaboration with Sinn Féin and of 'Agitators travelling from Germany in a U-boat'. The seizure was reported as having led to the arrest of Liam Mellowes and a number of Sinn Féin members in New York.[23]

There was no appetite in America to become involved in what was seen as a European war, and Irish-Americans, who were greatly influential in the Democratic Party, had no wish for the country to go to war on Britain's side,

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[19] Admiralty to Under Secretary, Dublin Castle, 6 Aug.1918 (NAI, CO 904).
[20] Admiralty to Bayly, 18 Sept. 1916 (NAI, CO 904).
[21] Letter from Admiralty House, signed by Bayly's secretary, H.G. Russell, to the Under Secretary, Dublin Castle (NAI, CO 904).
[22] Information Bulletin USN, 8 April 1918 (NARA, RG 313/9Q/Box 2).
[23] *New York Times*, 11 Nov. 1917 (www.query.nyt.com).

and they were fully behind Woodrow Wilson's policy of neutrality. The same Irish-Americans were fully informed of activities in Ireland during the years prior to the war, and the British response to the 1916 rising hardened their attitudes to Britain, but when events forced Wilson to declare war, the sympathies of Irish-America changed from 'Ireland first' to 'America first'.[24] Wilson was returned to power in the election of 1916 with the support of Irish-Americans and it has been suggested that they were motivated by American issues rather than Irish ones.[25] They were now able to demonstrate their loyalty to the United States and to be seen to be more American.[26] Moreover, Wilson was an advocate of the principle of self-determination for all countries in his post-war objectives and this was a message that resonated with Irish-Americans.[27] The atmosphere changed so much between April 1917 and the end of the war that almost all nationalist covert activities were put on hold and pro-German sympathies ceased, as did contacts between German spies and Irish nationalists.[28]

This change of heart is significant because it brought the United States Navy in Ireland into conflict with much local nationalist thinking. As the American warships arrived it was probably a little bewildering to many Irish people to see hundreds of Irish-Americans, who would normally be supportive of their cause, now arriving in Ireland to fight England's cause. It must have been equally bewildering for the same sailors, many with close Irish backgrounds, enthused with the heightened sense of patriotism that swept America once Wilson declared war, to arrive in Ireland and find so many of their kin considering them to be traitors. This is a matter that Sims believed to be at the heart of the problem of the conflict between sailors and locals.[29]

It might be added that that it was also a surprise to the new arrivals to see so many young Irishmen still at home while Americans were signing on in their thousands to come to the aid of the Allies.[30] An example of the views of

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[24] Bernadette Whelan, *United States foreign policy and Ireland: from empire to independence, 1913-29* (Dublin, 2006), p. 140.
[25] Ibid., p. 122.
[26] Ibid., p. 140.
[27] Ibid., p. 129.
[28] Ibid., p. 156.
[29] Vice Adm. William W.S.Sims, *The victory at sea* (New York, 1920) p. 84.
[30] *The Queenstown patrol, 1917: the diary of Commander Joseph Knefler Taussig U.S. Navy*, ed. William S. Still (Newport, 1996), p. 59.

some American sailors is an account by a bluejacket who served on the USS *McDougal*, one of the ships in the first flotilla to arrive at Queenstown: 'Most of the men aboard the *McDougal*, if not all, had already lost all sympathy for the cause of Irish independence. The tactics of Sinn Féiners disgusted us.'[31] This attitude was reflected in a letter to the *New York Times* a year after the war ended by two officers who had served in the USNAS. In a long letter they stated:

> There is no question that there was open hostility between the Irish Sinn Féiners and members of the American forces...Our men had come thousands of miles to aid in the war against Germany and they were very naturally incensed at finding an element in Ireland which never lost an opportunity to give aid and assistance to the enemy...We were amazed, indeed, to find a large percentage of the population, all of military age, going about their daily existence of loafing during the day and sneaking around in military formations in preparation for their threatened revolt every night.[32]

While covert nationalist activities may have been in abeyance, it was not the case that overt activities ceased. The attitude of Sinn Féin members in both Ireland and America never ceased to annoy Sims and he began a long-lasting campaign in the USA against them that continued even after the war while he was president of the Naval War College in Newport, R.I. In one letter he said that he had 'sent out more than 1000 acknowledgements of telegrams, letters, resolutions, etc. of commendations on my sentiments in respect of the Sinn Féin, and still they come in bunches every morning.'[33]

He was convinced that there was ongoing Sinn Féin and German collusion throughout the war and was in no doubt about Sinn Féin's attitude to the United States navy's presence:

> I have a great admiration for the mass of Irish people, and from the best elements of these people the American sailors received only kindness. I have therefore hesitated about telling just about how some members of Sinn Fein treated our men. But it seems that now when this same brotherhood is attempting to stir up hatred in this country against our Allies in the war, there is a certain pertinence in informing Americans just what kind of treatment these brave sailors met at the hands of Sinn Fein in Ireland.[34]

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[31] Charles Minor Blackford, *Torpedoboat sailor* (Annapolis, 1968), p. 78.
[32] *New York Times*, 4 Nov. 1919.
[33] Sims to 'Sissie' 6 Jul. 1921, Sims' papers (NHC, MS Coll. 38/box 9).
[34] Sims, *The victory at sea*, p. 83.

Bayly's views on Irishmen were equally unequivocal. Even though he was responsible for thousands of them being employed at the dockyard in Haulbowline—albeit out of necessity—he gave the Admiralty his opinion that nine out of ten Irishmen could not be trusted; that men wanted to work in Haulbowline only to learn how to make bombs; and that the RIC was not to be trusted ('not so much the officers as to the more ignorant constables in the west and south').[35] It must be recognised though that Bayly was a pragmatist in his dealings with Sinn Féin sympathisers employed in the dockyard. He was a martinet in naval or military matters and was a hardliner on how opposition to the war effort should be dealt with. For instance, his advice to the Admiralty on conscription was unambiguous. His position was that unless conscription was introduced and implemented firmly by sufficient troops, the rebels would take over and the country would descend into chaos.[36] Surprisingly, he added that despite the feeling of 'rebels' in Cork county toward to the navy, 'there is no great feeling of enmity against the navy'.[37] This would undoubtedly have been attributed to the long association between Cork, and especially Queenstown, and the navy and to the numbers of families that had members and relatives serving in it. Even greater numbers of men and their families owed their livelihoods to the dockyard at Haulbowline, despite what Bayly may have thought of their motives for working there. There were incidents, however, when nationalist tensions were raised. One of these is described by a Royal Navy stoker on *HMS Jessamine* who was on picket duty in Queenstown in 1916:

> One evening ashore I was in charge of a picket myself and two stokers, pickets were doubled so I knew trouble was expected. My beat was on the main street with plenty of pubs and being

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[35] Bayly, Admiralty/memorandum to cabinet, 6 May 1918 (TNA, CAB 24/50).

[36] Ibid. An indication of Bayly's character and his commitment to the ethos of naval officers' duty to obey orders regardless of personal feelings, was shown during the British Army officers' mutiny in the Curragh in 1914. With the army effectively refusing to take up arms against the Ulster Volunteers following the Larne gunrunning, Churchill ordered a Royal Navy squadron to do the job that the army was refusing to do. There was considerable support for the army officers in Ireland from their colleagues in Britain but there was also support from many naval officers. However, the squadron went to Lamlash, in Scotland, having taken on extra guns at Devonport on the way, and awaited whatever orders were to come. The commander of the squadron, who had confirmed that he would act as ordered, was Vice Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly. For a more detailed account of the navy's involvement in the incident and the views of several naval officers, see Ian F.W. Beckett, *The army and the Curragh incident, 1914* (London, 1986) and Peter Gretton, *Former naval person: Winston Churchill and the Royal Navy (London, 1968)*, pp155-9.

[37] Bayly to Admiralty, 6 May 1918 (TNA, CAB 24/50).

> evening time they were very busy. The Irish Constabulary was out in force and kept very busy but we only dealt with naval misconduct. Being in charge of a picket, not armed, just a leather belt and canvas gaiters, a whistle and armlet N.P., I warned my chaps that it was near closing time to ignore insults from civilians and try and keep their tempers and not ask for trouble – which was quite rife. As I reached the end of our beat, I heard another patrol whistle calling for help. I could not ignore it so we returned to the scene of the trouble. About 50 or 60 men and women in the middle of which a patrol being attacked. I ordered my two chaps to hide their belts and armlets, pull trousers over gaiters so as not to appear authoritative and we pushed our way into the centre where the patrol leader was lying in the road injured and was unconscious. Some other bluejackets and marines were hurrying to the spot. I had four chaps now with me. So as a last resort to break up the party so we pushed a space amid a lot of abuse and shouting, whistled for assistance and attended to the man on the ground. He was bleeding and lay quite still. I rose to look around to see if help was coming. I received a few clouts but as I was rising I was struck on the head with something hard, I felt like passing out. I was bleeding but I was in a fearful temper I'm afraid when a chap told me it was a young woman with a bottle in a string bag that caught me. So as a last resort I ordered 'use the buckles of your belts and swing them' and as they swung their belts, so the pressure eased and I seized the young woman who struck me and as help arrived. We arrested some of the belligerent characters and frog-marched them and dragged them on their knees over cobblestones making their knees bleed. We got to the guardhouse where they were handed over to the civilian police. Quite a restful evening I thought, after we thanked the Tommies who came to our rescue.[38]

Despite this, there was a general affinity with the Royal Navy in other ports around the country also. Galway had a long history of association with the British Army through one of its most distinguished regiments, the Connaught Rangers, but Galway city also had an association with the Royal Navy through its naval base there. The Claddagh, an area in Galway city where the river Corrib meets Galway Bay, was still a small fishing village of no more than 110 houses at the start of the war. It was a very close-knit community whose Irish-speaking population continued to retain a separate identity to the rest of the population in the city, and almost every family was directly involved with the fishing fleet. The link between the people of the Claddagh and the Royal Navy was remarkable. This is shown from reports in a

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[38] Memoirs of Stoker F.W. Smith (IWM, F.W.Smith 02/2/1), pp 110-111.

number of local newspapers on the response of the community to the call for volunteers. At a meeting in Galway in October 1914, Stephen Gwynn MP was recorded as stating that one hundred and twenty Claddagh men were in the navy.[39] The *Galway Express* carried a report on 24 April 1915 that two hundred and fifty men had left the Claddagh to volunteer, the 'vast majority' to join the navy, leaving none but the middle-aged after Christmas.[40] Later, at a meeting in the town hall in January 1916 an address was read to the Governor General, Lord Wimborne, on behalf of the Galway Urban Council in which it was stated that one hundred and forty men from the Claddagh were serving in the navy.[41] The loss of so many experienced fishermen had a serious effect on the fishing fleet and a consequent loss of income to the area that was only partly alleviated by the 'liberal allowances paid by the Admiralty and the War Office to the wives or mothers on active service'.[42]

It has been argued that the practice of joining the navy was 'more a way of life' than because of 'allegiance' to the navy or Britain and that the high numbers joining was more likely to be related to another long-standing practice of Claddagh men joining the Royal Naval Reserve.[43] Whatever the reason for such numbers joining up it is most unlikely that their families would have harboured antagonism towards the navy, and more likely that they would have had an affinity with it.

The Royal Navy base in Galway, small as it was, was a welcome presence in the city because of the extra commercial activity that it created. Apart from the money that sailors themselves might have spent, there were other financial benefits. For instance, the *Galway Express* noted that a contract for supplying bread to the patrol fleet for the west of Ireland was awarded to a local bakery (partly because the bakery had recently installed new equipment and so was able to handle the extra volume).[44] It also noted that the flotilla had to be coaled, and that agreement had been reached to deliver coal to Barna for the navy from where it would be supplied to the

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[39] Stephen Gwynn, in *Connaught Tribune*, 3 Oct. 1914.
[40] *Galway Express*, 24 Apr. 1915.
[41] *Connaught Tribune*, 5 Jan. 1916.
[42] *Galway Express*, 13 Nov. 1915.
[43] Conor McNamara, 'Republicanism, communal violence, and persistence of sectarianism in the west 1918-1921', paper read at Centre for Contemporary History, TCD, 6 Oct. 2010.
[44] *Galway Express*, 13 Feb. 1915

ships. This, and the extra activity on the docks, would combine to increase employment in the area. Even the *Connaught Tribune* noted how the urban council benefitted by charging for the supply of fresh water to the ships.[45]

These relationships were under increasing pressure from the growing republican mood of the country and the growing support for Sinn Féin, and despite Sims' complaints about Sinn Féin, his opinions were not heeded by the Navy Board. Josephus Daniels, the Secretary of the Navy, did not recognise any tensions between the Irish and American sailors when, in his account of the war, he wrote 'one regrettable incident at Cork, where there was an unruly element attacked some of our sailors was recognised as an exception' and that 'the Irish people received us with open arms'.[46]

One officer on Sims' staff headquarters in London described these incidents as being a few unfortunate disturbances between the sailors and the Irish in Cork: 'The southern Irishman did not seem like an easy man with whom to get along...in other words these affairs resulted in a misunderstanding between the sailors and the Irishmen.'[47]

When they first arrived, American sailors were granted shore leave without any restrictions on where they could go so, as Queenstown was a small town, Cork city became the popular venue. The free-spending sailors were very popular with local businesses in Cork and especially with the local girls. One sailor's description of this popularity with the girls states: '...the American sailor made the hit with the Irish girls, it seemed as though every sailor had a girl'.[48] This early good feeling towards the Americans was also noted in the Police Inspector's monthly report which carried his account of the sailors mingling freely with British soldiers, sailors, and with the civilian population.[49] It was their popularity with the local girls that was the cause of much of the conflict between the sailors and the local men, together with the fact that that the sailors had money and spent it freely. Despite his general condemnation of Irishmen, Sims did recognize that the catalyst for many of the confrontations was the popularity of the sailors among Irish girls and how

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[45] *Connaught Tribune*, 21 Feb. 1920.
[46] Josephus Daniels, *Our navy at war* (Cranbury, 1922), p. 361.
[47] John Langton Leighton, *Simsadus* (New York, 1920), pp 32-3.
[48] Diary of David Jenkins, Chief Gunner's Mate, 15 July 1917 (NHS, MS Item 238).
[49] Police Inspector's report, 1 June 1917 (NAI, CO904/104).

liberally they were able to spend money.[50] Pringle was likeminded, believing that sailors freely spending money was at the root of the problem.[51] While there may be debate over the reasons for the attacks on the sailors, there is none about the fact that they happened.

One American journalist who was based in Queenstown for several weeks during the summer of 1917 gave his explicit analysis of the relationship between the Irish and the sailors, and how the sailors were treated:

> When it came to fraternizing with the Irish natives of the port, the American sailor suffered disillusions, and his views of conditions, political and social, were radically changed. There were hundreds of Irish-Americans in the destroyers. One could not imagine a fighting ship without them, but they, too, lost much of that sympathy for down-trodden, martyred Ireland which had been absorbed at home...The American fleet was insulted, jeered, and regarded as a hostile force because it had sailed across the sea to help England in the common cause against the enemy.[52]

During the first week of September 1917, there were a number of attacks on sailors, or incidents involving them, in Cork. In one of these incidents, a police report notes that 'parties of young men calling themselves members of a "Vigilante Committee" mobbed American sailors who were walking with girls. These men are Sinn Féiners'.[53] In a military intelligence report by Captain Maunsell, Southern District, Cork, the same incidents are blamed on Sinn Féiners acting as a 'Vigilante Committee'.[54] These attacks were reported in the *New York Times* under the heading 'Sinn Féiners Attack American Sailors'.[55]

A more serious attack happened on 8 September 1917 in which a sailor, John Parente of the USS *Melville,* was walking in Cork with a Cork girl when they were accosted by a local, Fred Plummer. A row broke out and Parente landed a punch on Plummer, who fell to the ground and hit his head against the pavement. He died a few hours later. This was clearly a serious

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[50] Sims, General report, 11 Sept. 1917 (NARA, RG 45/520/452/folder 2).
[51] Pringle to Bayly, 5 Sept. 1917 (NARA, RG 45/520/455/folder 3).
[52] Ralph D. Paine, *The fighting fleets* (London, 1918), p. 91.
[53] County Inspector's report, 7. 1917 (NAI, CO904/104).
[54] Military Reports: Intelligence Officers 1916-1918, 31 Dec. 1917 (NAI, CO 904).
[55] *New York Times*, 5 Sept. 1917 .

incident but, apart from two brief official reports,[56] most of the information about it comes from newspaper accounts.[57] The *Freeman's Journal,* the *Irish Times* and the *Cork Examiner* report the incident but the latter newspaper's account includes evidence taken at the coroner's inquest on 10 September.[58] It also records that the jury, in delivering its verdict, disagreed with a statement made by the coroner that there was ill-feeling between the residents of Queenstown and the Americans.[59] The *Irish Times* later reported that Parente appeared before Queenstown Petty Sessions on 5 October and was returned for trial to the next assizes,[60] but the *Cork Examiner's* account includes extensive details of the evidence under a statement that its account had been 'released by Censor'.[61] The *Irish Times'* account states that while feeling was intense in Queenstown following the incident, the public anger was directed more against the Cork girls than against the sailors.[62]

Following the attacks in Cork early in September, all shore leave was cancelled, but this was later modified and sailors were prohibited from going within three miles of Cork city.[63] This increased the number of sailors walking around Queenstown looking for recreation and raising the tension, sometimes leading to friction, between them and the locals. The *Cork Examiner* recognised this tension but believed that many of the reported incidents of conflict were exaggerated and were no more than scuffles, mostly between groups of sailors, that could be described as 'jostling, hilarious boisterousness and street horseplay'.[64] Incidents of the type described by the *Examiner* would not have been uncommon in naval ports throughout the world where large

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[56] Military Reports: Intelligence Officers, 1916-1918, 30 Sept. 1917 (NAI, CO 904); Police Inspector's Report, 2 Oct. 1917 (NAI, CO 904/MFA54/62).
[57] The Chief Secretary's Office files give little information on the matter. The index of files indicates that there was a considerable amount of correspondence, departmental notes and depositions but, unfortunately, all are missing. For instance, the CSO Index refers to 'USA sailor J. W. Parchute(sic). Homicide of F. Plumber (sic) by. L22188—22327—22447—22481—22557—22944—25141—26135(end). No papers on file'. The index also records, 'letters IG 22/9, depositions taken at inquest, nothing, copies of depositions inquest AG 14/9, JD 17/9. Carroll too ill to act in R v P. wire to Carroll, min to IG and JD 20/9/Carroll ack. insts. to act JD (25141)' 15/10 C Sec 11/11', but the documents are missing.
[58] *Freeman's Journal, Irish Times, Cork Examiner,* 12 Sept. 1917.
[59] *Cork Examiner,* 12 Sept. 1917.
[60] *Irish Times,* 6 Oct. 1917.
[61] *Cork Examiner,* 6 Oct. 1917.
[62] *Irish Times,* 12 Sept. 1917.
[63] Bayly, *Pull Together,* p. 233.
[64] *Cork Examiner,* 8 Sept. 1917.

numbers of sailors, in high spirits, were allowed ashore in search of recreation.

Banning the sailors from Cork caused some anguish among the business community there and resulted in a deputation of businessmen from Cork, led by the lord mayor, T.C.Butterfield, to Admiral Bayly, assuring him that the town was fully supportive of the naval base, and requesting that the embargo to be lifted.[65] Bayly refused the request unless he received an assurance from Butterfield guaranteeing the safety of any sailor who visited Cork. It was impossible for Butterfield to give any such guarantee, as Bayly undoubtedly knew, so the ban remained for the rest of the war. The loss of business to Cork must have been keenly felt, but businesses in Queenstown would have benefited significantly – and not just obvious businesses like bars, restaurants and cinemas. An example of one such business was a family tailoring outfitters in Queenstown that had a regular trade in making uniforms for officers of both navies during the war.``[66]

Placing Cork off-limits to enlisted men was a sensible decision because of what followed, and it was fortunate that the decision was taken promptly.

The general tenor of this story was confirmed by Sims' account of the incident in which he described the temper of the sailors as being very high—to the extent that blacksmiths on the tender USS *Melville* were discovered making 'weapons which our men could conceal on their persons and with which they proposed to sally forth and do battle with the Sinn Féin'.[67]

The depth of feelings among the sailors can be understood from an account by David Jenkins, Chief Gunner's Mate, on USS *Fanning.* His description is both lengthy and detailed, but it paints such a vivid picture of how the sailors felt that it is worth quoting at length:

> Even if a fellow done right and bothered no one, he was bound to run into a gang of Sinn Feiners and they would always start trouble, they always made sure they had three to one before they started. Things got so bad it was not safe to go to Cork unless you expected to, or wished to take a chance to not only get beat up but killed...The Sinn Feiners had no use for the American sailor and very little use for the English....That made the Sinn

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[65] Sims, Report, 15 Sept. 1917 (NARA, RG 45/520/452).
[66] Mary Broderick, *A history of Cobh* (Cork, 1989), pp 133, 138. The author is a member of the family that owned the tailoring business and she quotes from business accounts of the period.
[67] Sims, *The victory at sea*, p. 87.

> Feiners go on the warpath, so one night, they met some place, unknown and came marching downtown, with the red flag, clubs and Irish confeti [sic] (bricks and stones). There was some battle fought, from the heart of the city to the railway station...a number of American officers and sailors were struck and injured by stones and afterwards sent to hospital...After that the liberty was stopped for several days, then orders came, liberty would be granted at Queenstown only, no enlisted man being allowed to go to Cork. But the men wanted just one more liberty in Cork, in less than 24 hours, after the fight, there was more blackjacks turned out among the boys than they make in two months in the states. Every one wanted to go to Cork, just once more, the uniform would have been blackjacks, lead pipe, and small clubs, anything to crown a sinn feiner, everything was fixed for the last liberty, but it did not come, it would have been some liberty party, but all hands were badly disappointed.[68]

Confining shore leave to Queenstown did not bring an end to interaction between sailors and Irish girls because, instead of waiting to meet sailors in Cork, the girls began travelling in large numbers to Queenstown by train to meet the sailors. The *Irish Times* of 12 December 1917 reported that girls from Cork 'travelled in their hundreds to Queenstown to meet them each night'.[69] This increased activity in Queenstown created other problems, and police reports describe an ongoing campaign against the practice of girls travelling to visit the sailors. It was reported that one priest advised the people 'to take the law into their own hands', resulting in an attack on girls in Glanmire railway station on 8 March 1918 by 'a crowd of hooligans'.[70] The police were on the scene quickly and baton-charged the assailants. In the ensuing *mêlée*, stones were thrown and 'two police were hurt, one seriously; three revolver shots were fired by the crowd, but nobody was hit'.[71] One newspaper reported that a large crowd continued to harry the group of sailors after they had left the girls, 'hissing and jeering' them. They were joined by another group carrying a Sinn Féin flag who shouted 'Up the Huns' and 'Up Dublin'. Sometime later a group of four sailors was attacked on Merchants' Quay before the police finally restored order at about 11pm.[72]

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[68] David Jenkins Diary (NHC, MS Item 238), pp 15-16.
[69] *Irish Times*, 12 Dec. 1917 .
[70] County Inspector's report, 2 Apr. 1918 (NAI, CO 904/915).
[71] Ibid.
[72] *Cork Examiner*, 4 Sept. 1917.

Another report in the *New York Times* on 27 February 1918 describes fifteen American sailors being attacked by a gang carrying Sinn Fein flags.[73] The Americans were joined by another group of their colleagues and serious fighting ensued before it was eventually broken up by the police, who escorted the sailors to their ship. This did not end the matter because the report described the crowd remaining and throwing rocks and stones at the ship.[74] The report generated a very angry letter from a reader to the editor a few days later, complaining about how America was being insulted and about how badly American sailors were being treated in Ireland.[75] Another letter from a naval officer complained of being called a 'dirty Yank', and when motoring through the country from one station to another being greeted by shouts of 'Up Germany' and 'Up Sinn Féin' by men 'directing a barrage of stones at us'.[76] His summary of the situation was that: 'There is no question that there was open hostility between the Irish Sinn Feiners and members of the American forces.'

Queenstown Urban District Council was also becoming dismayed at the number of girls who were coming to Queenstown to meet the sailors and, in March 1918, adopted the motion:

> that we strongly protest against the disgraceful scenes of immorality by strangers to be witnessed in our public thoroughfares of late which we deeply deplore. That as the state of things existing has become a scandal to all self-residents [sic] and visitors, as well as a source of peril to the morals of our young people of Queenstown urge upon the police authorities and others in a position to checkmate this terrible evil to take strong and effective measures towards that end. That we fully approve the warning recently issued by the Most Rev. Dr. Cahalan and his clergy to young people visiting Queenstown for the purposes of vice, and we furthermore join with his Lordship and clergy in protesting against the establishment of a hospital at Spike Island for the treatment of the disease mentioned by them.[77]

There were further instances of perceived moral misbehaviour. In September 1917, an incident reported by Ensign Denis Ryan of USS *Conyngham* caused considerable annoyance to Captain Pringle and Admiral

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[73] *New York Times*, 27 Feb. 1918
[74] Ibid., 27 Feb. 1918.
[75] Ibid., 1 Mar. 1918.
[76] *New York Times*, 4 Nov. 1919.
[77] *Cork Examiner*, 21 Mar. 1918.

Bayly. Ryan reported that at mass in St. Colman's Cathedral on 9 September the priest gave a strong caution to parents to

> look out for their young daughters especially since there had lately arrived on our shores hundreds of vultures, yea I might say thousands of them, who were preying on the purity of our daughters of Queenstown.[78]

A strong protest was made to the bishop who, in turn, 'expressed his regret that such statements had been used and expressed his disapproval of them'.[79] Admiral Bayly had developed a good working relationship with Bishop Robert Browne, whom he describes as 'a great gentleman, and...never failed to help me when I asked for assistance'.[80] This was reciprocated because Bishop Browne, at the height of the submarine campaign, asked Bayly if he could help in the safe transportation of forty two new bells for the cathedral from Liverpool to Queenstown. Bayly agreed, and arranged for the bells to be transported by sea directly to Queenstown.[81]

Personal accounts by Sinn Féin members of how they viewed the influx of American sailors are limited so it is difficult to determine how much they resented their intrusion, what was the extent of the friction between them, and how strongly they actually felt about the Americans aiding Britain in the war. One personal account by a prominent Sinn Féin activist, Michael O'Donoghue, dwells mainly on friction between American sailors and 'Tommies' to the extent of stating that the reason for American sailors being finally prohibited from going to Cork was because of 'bloody and brutal war' between them over women.[82] This point is contradicted by Henry Beston, an American war correspondent, who claims that American sailors were 'far more chummy' with British soldiers than they were with British sailors.[83] However, O'Donoghue did recognise the bitterness among Americans about Sinn Féin's

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[78] Report of Ensign Dennis Ryan, 9 Sept. 1917 (NARA, RG 45/520/Box 452/folder 2).
[79] Sims, 'General Report', 15 Sept. 1917 (NARA, RG 45/520/Box 452/folder 2).
[80] Bayly, *Pull Together,* pp 85-6.
[81] Ibid., pp 185-6. These bells were a carillon that had been made by the Loughborough bell foundry of John and Dennison Taylor. They are described in the *Musical Times* as 'the largest and finest carillon in the United Kingdom and the most perfect set of bells in the world tuned to equal temperament'. *Musical Times,* 1 February 1918) (www.jstor.org).
[82] Michael V. O'Donoghue, Witness statement (BMH, WS 1741). O'Donoghue was Engineer, Cork No. 1 Brigade in 1921, and was president of the GAA between 1952 and 1955. I am grateful to Eve Morrison guiding me to this reference.
[83] Henry B. Beston, *Full speed ahead* (New York, 1919), p. 147.

pro-German stance and how careful he had to be about expressing these opinions when in earshot of any sailors:

> ...thousands of American naval men flooded Cork city...I had a good opportunity of studying them as they frequented my 'digs', a restaurant and fruit shop in Old George's St. opposite the GPO. USA non-coms and ratings came in daily to regale themselves with strawberries and cream...Their pay and allowances were then huge, by British standards, and they spent their money like water on all kinds of luxuries...and thereby incurred the fierce envy and hate of the poor scraggy English Tommy...Dames follow the dollars and arrival of Yankee sailors caused a mass swing-over by Cork belles from their 'Tommy' sweethearts to the dollar-flush Yanks. They waged bloody and brutal war on the US sailors. So fierce grew the feud between them that the US naval command had to put Cork city out of bounds for its sailors. But to solace the pangs of frustration of the USA navy, special trains were daily run in late evening to Cove to accommodate the swarms of love-sick or dollar-sick ladies from the city who yearned for their Yankee boys...Many were strong in support of Ireland as a small nation, but all expressed a bitter and (to me) insane hate of Germany, and I had to be mighty careful to avoid arousing their hostility by showing any pro-German sentiments.[84]

Despite these problems, it should be noted that the Chief Censor's Office was of the opinion that the attitude towards American sailors in Ireland was different from that experienced by the soldiers, whose presence seems to have been welcomed. The report of that Censor's Office for August/September 1918 states, of the soldiers, that 'their popularity is extraordinary, partly on account of the money they spend, partly because the Sinn Feiners hope that their intervention will prevent Irishmen from going to the Front.'[85]

It is also worthy of note that there was occasional friction between American and British sailors. Officers of both navies got on well together and there are no accounts of any tensions between them but ratings did not always see eye to eye. One account, by an American rating, describes some of the feelings that existed:

> There was no bond between American sailors and the average British seaman. The educational and cultural gap was too large. We fared better with soldiers, Canadians, Australians. The kind of people with whom we felt at home snubbed us in England...We puzzled them with our disregard for their caste

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[84] Michael V. O'Donoghue, Witness statement (BMH, WS 1741).
[85] Censor of American Mail Report, 18 Aug. to 14 Sept. 1918 (TNA, CO 904/165).

> system and they could not understand our gall in buying first-class tickets to everything unless they refused to sell them to us, which frequently happened.[86]

This attitude was also observed by Henry Beston, an American journalist who spent several weeks in Queenstown and Berehaven, on patrol on destroyers and submarines, and who became familiar with the working and social habits of the American sailors. He identified the main problem as being age-related: the average American being younger than the typical British tar, but aggravated by the less egalitarian ethos in the Royal Navy:

> The Briton is, on the average, an older man than our bluejacket...British sailors enlist not 'to see the world'...but as the serious business of his life. His enlistment is an eight-year affair, and by the time he has completed he rarely thinks of returning to a prosaic life ashore...American sailors are usually somewhere in the eager irresponsible twenties, British tars are often men of sober middle age... [British] sons of gentlemen, however, did not join the Royal Navy as enlisted men. Such a thing would have been regarded as queer [although Beston admits that the war was bringing about a change in this attitude].[87]

Another American newspaper correspondent who worked for *Collier's*, James Connolly, experienced similar feelings of superiority among some British naval officers, not just towards ratings, but towards American naval officers also. He emphasised that the majority of British officers did not act so, but he is clear that an attitude of superiority did exist among some of them to the extent of describing one officer as being patronising towards his American colleagues.[88][89]

The war years were a politically turbulent period in Irish history because of Ireland's relationship with Britain and this created tensions about how the war was viewed. The initial support for Britain and the Allies, as reflected in the numbers of Irish who enlisted, soon declined in the face of mounting losses on the battlefield, and in the aftermath of the 1916 rising this turned to antipathy. Consequently, this had an adverse effect on relationships towards British military and naval personnel throughout the country. This

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[86] Blackford, *Torpedoboat sailor*, p.136.
[87] Beston, *Full speed ahead*, pp 141-3. Beston's book seems to be a compilation of articles he wrote during the war for *The Atlantic Monthly* and other magazines. viz. 'With the American submarines', in *The Atlantic Monthly, 1857-1932*, Nov. 1918, pp 688-97 (babel.hathitrust.org) (accessed 10 Jan 2011).
[88] John Connolly, *The U-boat hunters* (LaVerne, Tennessee, 1918, digital reprint, 2008), p. 189.
[89] Ibid.

meant that any nation coming to Britain's aid at this time was also likely to be subject to some degree of antipathy, and for many Irish people the sight of Americans coming to Ireland to support Britain was too much, and it affected how American sailors were treated in Cork. New influxes of American sailors were aware that Irishmen were not subject to conscription and this was an additional cause for friction.[90] Feelings also ran high when news that an informal agreement was reached between the two governments that Irishmen in America would be exempt from draft. In response, the Ancient Order of Hibernians felt it necessary to issue a statement that 'young men, recently arrived here from Ireland, will fight cheerfully with their citizen-brothers under the American flag [and]...will not fail in their duty to the United States.'[91] The *New York Times* carried reports of the attacks on sailors in Ireland, but it also carried reports such as 'British open arms to our officers: go out of their way to extend courtesies to army and navy men.'[92] Sentiments like these influenced the newly-arrived sailors in forming their opinions of the Irish, and these were aggravated by the same sailors' widespread views of Irish people being not just anti-British but pro-German, so there was a combination of distrust on one side and disillusion on the other that underla id the relationship. This was confined locally to the areas around Queenstown and Berehaven because the sailors were unable to venture inland because of restrictions on how far they could travel, and because of the limited free time they were allowed. Even Cork city remained a prohibited area for all sailors, ships' commanders excepted, for the last fourteen months of the war. Nonetheless, it is also a fact that not all sailors had negative views on the Irish; not all of them retained any negative opinions that they might have initially formed; and many returned with good impressions of their stay in Ireland.[93]

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[90] *New York Times*, 14 May 1918.
[91] *New York Times*, 25 May 1918.
[92] *New York Times*, 12 May 1918.
[93] This is based on statements made in the 1970s by three sailors who were based in Ireland in answer to a questionnaire that was put to surviving servicemen who served in the First World War. There may be others. The terms used by sailors William Becker, Wallace Graves, and Warren Cook to describe relations were 'friendly', 'very friendly', 'hospitable', 'liked by the Irish'. *World War 1 research project: army, navy and marine service experiences questionnaire* (USAMHI, Military History Research Collection).

However, it is also a reality that much of the friction during the war between sailors and locals was generated by the ease with which the sailors attracted the girls who travelled in their hundreds from Cork to Queenstown to meet them. While there was an underlying dislike between the two groups, the spark that ignited the reported confrontations was resentment by the local young men at the sight of so many sailors with money to spend being so successful with the girls.

Post-Treaty relationships

The signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty meant that for the first time in centuries the people of the new Irish Free State were part of an independent country, with their own government and defence force. Unusually, after a bitter campaign to achieve that freedom, it was agreed that the former occupier's army and navy would retain a presence in the country, especially in the strong republican area of Cork. This being so, it would not have been surprising for the members of those forces, now much-depleted and less of a threat, to be subjected to continued hostility. Similarly, it might have been expected if individual soldiers and sailors were exposed to abuse, insults, and worse, when they ventured beyond the confines of their military bases. However, a study of the kind of relationship that existed between the two sides after independence shows that this was not the case. There were undoubtedly pockets of resentment about British troops remaining on Irish soil but an overall impression emerges of an acceptance that ranged from tolerance to outright welcome towards them.

The end of the First World War saw the return home of the United States Navy and most of the Royal Navy, but it brought the start of a new phase of the conflict in Ireland with the start of the War of Independence in which the atmosphere in Ireland towards Britain and British troops changed considerably. This was reflected most pointedly in the response given to the thousands of Irish men who had served in the British Army during the Great War. They were no longer seen as men who has responded to the call to do their duty, as they believed it, to defend smaller nations against an oppressive power, but as men who had worn the uniform of another power that was continuing to oppress Ireland.

This served to bring about a further deterioration in relations between the military in the port garrisons, none more so than on Bere Island. One

republican, Liam Deasy, an officer in the IRA in west Cork, described Bere Island and the islanders as being in the thick of the War for Independence because of the British military there.[94] The local IRA unit was very active and there appears to be little doubt that there was wide support for its actions, most notably for raids on the Royal Engineers' store on Bere Island and also on a Royal Navy store on the Fastnet Rock lighthouse in which substantial quantities of explosives were seized.[95] A contributing factor in the local support was, undoubtedly, the presence of an internment camp, built on the site of a nine-hole golf course that the army had constructed, that held between one hundred and fifty and three hundred internees until it was closed in December 1921.[96] The conditions under which the internees suffered further exacerbated the antagonism that already existed, especially, as one writer has noted, there was free exchange of messages, surreptitiously, between the locals and the internees.[97]

The *Southern Star* gave an account of life in the camp in September 1921 in which it reported that there were then 284 internees, 133 of whom were housed in four wooden huts and the balance of 151 who were in 28 tents. There were continual complaints about both the quantity and quality of food, and especially about the discomfort of sleeping in tents in all weather conditions for months on end.[98] The latter complaint did not receive much attention, probably because tented accommodation was not unusual for British troops in the port garrisons during the Great War. (There is one descriptive account of the tented accommodation provided for the infantry that guarded the forts in Lough Swilly during the war: 'Below in the golden September sunlight lay the camp of my new regiment [the Royal Irish Rifles], the tiny honey-coloured cones of the tents ranged in orderly lines on a headland jutting out into the lough'.[99]) The internees' continual complaints did bring about a modicum of improvements but General Nevil Macready's view on the internees and their living conditions did not help their predicament: 'the

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[94] Liam Deasy, *Towards Ireland free: the West Cork Brigade in the War of Independence* (Cork, 1973), pp 318-332.
[95] Ibid., p.309
[96] Ted O'Sullivan, *Bere Island: a short history* (Cork, 1992), pp 25-26.
[97] Ibid., pp 27-28.
[98] *Southern Star*, 24 Sept. 1921.
[99] Ireland, *From the Irish shore*, p. 226.

internees could if they wished enjoy a measure of comfort considerably greater than many were accustomed to in their own dwellings.'[100]

Fort Westmoreland on Spike Island had been used as a convict prison in the mid-nineteenth century, and it was also used as an internment camp for hundreds of men during the War of Independence. Conditions in the camp were very poor and this also increased animosity towards troops in the garrison. However, there were other factors in Cork that were different to those on Bere Island that had a bearing on relations towards the garrison troops. The strength of the IRA in Cork and its violence has been well documented[101] but another analysis argues that because of the large numbers from Cork who traditionally had joined the British Army, there existed in 1919 considerable numbers of veterans who were living in the city and who were very visible.[102] The point is also made that officers on active duty lived openly in homes throughout Cork and that 'such a large percentage of Cork's young male population served in the recent war that virtually every IRA activist in Cork would have been friendly with an older brother, neighbour or co-worker who was a veteran'.[103]

After the War of Independence and the subsequent the Civil War, a good deal of local antagonism towards British servicemen eased, undoubtedly aided by the evacuation of all military barracks throughout the country, and by the infrequency with which Irishmen in the services were observed in uniform during the 1920s and 1930s. Irishmen continued to serve in the British armed services in high numbers and most people would have known extended family members or friends in the British forces. Indeed, as late as 1936, the Garda Chief Superintendent in Cork reported to the Commissioner, Eamonn Broy, that in the administrative area of Skibbereen in west Cork: 'Practically every family of the small farmer and labour class in the area have members in the British Navy and little notice is taken of these members when appearing in uniform [when on leave at home].'[104]

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[100] Nevil Macready, *Annals of an active life* (2 vols, London, 1924), ii, 511.
[101] Hart,, *The IRA and its enemies*, *passim*.
[102] Borgonovo, *Spies, informers and the anti Sinn Féin society*, p. 79.
[103] Ibid., pp 81-2.
[104] Chief Superintendent, Cork, to Commissioner, 12 Dec. 1936 (NAI, JUS 8/363).

The forts at Dunree were not used as internment camps during the War of Independence and it is likely that this contributed to the good relationships that existed after the Great War and continued for the next twenty years. One local history asserts that the relationships that existed between 1922 and 1938 were amicable: 'Personal reminiscences of old gunners in the fort reveal...that there was no hostile reaction by locals to the British troops, some of whom were Irish, of course' and that the British soldier who lowered the Union Jack at the formal handover of the fort to the Éire in 1938, Sgt. King of the Royal Artillery, and the Irish soldier who raised the tricolour, Sgt. McLaughlin, were brothers-in-law.[105]

However, while British troops in Lough Swilly got on well with locals, there was a problem, recognised in a wide-ranging report on defences in the three Treaty Ports, in that there were few of them in the vicinity of the forts, resulting in 'an insufficiency of female society, a serious matter for the troops'.[106] Despite this, one account of the interaction between civilians and troops remarks on 'the number of local girls marrying soldiers of the garrison' and cites this as more evidence of the good relations that existed throughout the Inisowen peninsula.[107] This may be so, but few of the girls were from the immediate areas of Dunree or Lenan. When dances were held in these two forts, which was a relatively frequent occurrence, most of the girls who attended came from Derry, travelling in buses that were chartered by the troops.[108] The girls who travelled from Derry were not popular with the local young men, if one incident that happened in 1929 is an indication of feelings towards them.

On 10 October 1929, a bus that was travelling from Derry to Fort Lenan with twenty three girls on board was stopped and commandeered about eleven miles from Lenan by a gang of armed men who drove it to Doagh, where they stripped the girls of their shoes and stockings. They then left the girls there and forced the driver to leave the scene with a warning not to return.[109] Supt. O'Riordan's report made it clear that there was nothing political in the

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[105] Declan O'Carroll, *Fort Dunree: a history* (Buncrana, undated), pp 4,7.
[106] Lt-Col. H. Crerar, 'Report on Irish coast defences', 23 Jun 1925 (TNA, WO 32/5315).
[107] Clements, *Defending the north*, p. 79.
[108] Superintendent, Buncrana to Chief Supt., Letterkenny, 25 Oct 1930 (NAI, GR/1517).
[109] Ibid., partially dated report 1929 (NAI, GR/1517).

incident and was what he termed 'a moral' issue. He also stated that 'after investigation, I beg to state that the girls are of low character...they have been used to patronising the soldiers' dances at Lenan fort. The soldiers it is learned provide a bus for the purpose and pay the fare of the girls.'[110] On another occasion a Garda report stated that 'the bus from Derry usually arrived at 7.30pm and left on the return journey at 5.30-6.00am the following morning.'[111]

The same Garda superintendent complained that patrolling the dances was onerous with the manpower at his disposal and he suggested that some pressure be put on the British military to have the dances stopped. This was done quietly through External Affairs and the High Commissioner and the dances were eventually stopped.[112]

It was not all one way traffic though, as soldiers regularly travelled to Derry every Saturday night, there being little in the way of appealing recreation locally.[113] In fact, one report in 1925 declared that Derry was the only place to which the soldiers would travel for ordinary recreation, even though the fare was quite expensive ('10/- [ten shillings] each way per man by hired motor').[114] Whenever sufficient numbers wished to travel, they chartered a bus to take them to and from Derry, 'invariably' stopping at Buncrana on the return journey 'where the men visit a fish and chip shop'.[115] The same report noted that the men were always well-conducted and there was never any trouble between them and the local population.[116]

Recreational facilities in the two forts were poor, being confined to one football field at Dunree, which was sixteen miles from Lenan by road, although it could be reached by a four mile walk along a coastal pathway. Golf was an activity that could have been availed of in the area but mainly by officers. There was a golf course, of sorts, within the confines of the garrison at one time and one officer who was stationed there during the war recorded how punishment was meted on occasions: 'the CO at the time, who had

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[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid., 25 Oct 1930.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Lt-Col. H. Crerar, to War Office, 23 Jun 1925 (TNA, WO 32/5315).
[115] Asst. Commissioner D. MacCoillte to Sec. Dept. of Justice, 3 Nov. 1936 (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[116] Ibid.

unorthodox methods of enforcing discipline: malefactors could always be employed in making a golf course for the officers of the battalion, even on occasion, caddying for them.'[117]

One of the main recreational activities in which sailors from destroyers became engaged when their destroyer docked for a few days was sport, usually football, against a team from the garrison. Frequent matches were also arranged between teams drawn from the forts, and even from batteries within the forts. Sports contests between teams drawn from the garrisons and naval destroyers were strongly encouraged by the high commands of both forces, and the weekly diaries of ships' commanders invariably included a paragraph on any sports engagement by the crew if a vessel was docked for a day or two at a port. For instance, HMS *Warwick*, in between evacuating coastguard stations around the coast in 1922, stopped for a few days in Lough Swilly and played a cricket match against the garrison troops.[118] There was less opportunity for this type of sports event from later 1925 and during the 1930s because Royal Navy destroyers only called to Lough Swilly occasionally.

Bere Island was no more an attractive garrison than Lough Swilly. It was sparsely populated, with no amenities other than those provided within the forts, and the nearest town of Castletownbere, on the mainland, was relatively small and offered few attractions. The army felt that one consequence of the isolation of the garrisons on the island was that contact between the troops and the Irish Free State was less developed than at Queenstown.[119] There was one 'so-called' football field for the troops but it was in poor condition and unplayable most of the time,[120] and another football field on Admiralty land beside Beale Lough, close to Castletownbere, but it also was of poor quality and had not been used for some years before 1933 and recommendations were made to the Admiralty that it be dispensed with.[121] Lt-Col. Crerar's report does not mention a golf course as being under military control in 1925 but one undoubtedly was created because reference is made to one being under Admiralty control on Admiralty land at Beale Lough

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[117] Ireland, *From the Irish shore*, p. 226.
[118] HMS Warwick, 'Report of proceedings', 4-18 May 1922 (TNA, ADM 1/8632/173).
[119] Lt-Col. H. Crerar, 'Report on Irish coast defences', 23 June 1925 (TNA, WO 32/5315).
[120] Ibid.
[121] S. Phillips, Military Intelligence, memorandum to Admiralty, 14 Aug. 1933; Lt-Cdr. H. Adams, to C-in-C, Plymouth, 19 Apr. 1935 (TNA, ADM 1/8787).

in 1933, alongside a drill ground.[122] The quality of the course was recognised as being poor and it seems that officers played at Glengarriff whenever possible, and an Admiralty report in later years noted that anyone had access to it and that it was being used by local inhabitants.[123]

After Irish independence, relations between the garrison and Castletownbere became amicable, and there do not appear to be any reports of politically motivated incidents, a fact confirmed by the efforts of the townspeople to have a Royal Navy flotilla visit the area, as described elsewhere.

Available records of the visits of destroyers that were stationed in Irish waters indicate that there was a deal of interaction, much of it sporting, between the ships' crews and the local population and the garrison troops. The main sport in the Castletownbere area in which sailors engaged with locals during the 1930s was rugby. Surviving diaries from HMS *Crescent, Cygnet, Valentine, Walpole, Scotsman, and Westcott* record many rugby matches played against teams from Castletownbere and Bantry, including several in which crew members played for the local teams.[124] The crew of *Westcott* appreciated the contact with Castletown Rugby Club and put on a concert in the town to raise funds for the club.[125] The fact that rugby is the only team sport mentioned in connection with the local people tends to confirm that most social contact was with the Protestant or loyalist members of the area. The only time soccer is mentioned is when ships' teams played a match against the garrison troops on Bere Island, although, with Gaelic football being so popular in west Cork and Kerry, there may not have been any soccer clubs in the area.

There was another obstacle in that the Gaelic Athletic Association rules prohibited any member from attending any social event organised by British military forces, and any member who played rugby, soccer, or hockey was liable to suspension.[126] The British forces were familiar with these prohibitions, so the commander of HMS *Westcott* recorded the surprise of

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[122] Phillips, memorandum to Admiralty, 14 Aug. 1933 (TNA, ADM 1/8787).
[123] Lt-Cdr. H. Adams to C-in-C, Plymouth, 19 Apr. 1935 (TNA, ADM 1/8787).
[124] Confidential diaries of named destroyers in 1934 (TNA, ADM 116/2990; ADM 116/2958).
[125] HMS *Westcott*, confidential diary, 3 Apr. 1934 (TNA, ADM 116/2990).
[126] This was under the Gaelic Athletic Association's famous Rule 21 (abolished in 2001). (www.gaa.ie).

many locals when they saw that the referee at one match between Castletown rugby club and a team from his ship was 'one Roy Hilary...a man sent down by Mr de Valera to combat the "Blue Shirt" movement, and here he was, not only refereeing a "Sassenach" game, but one in which the Royal Navy was taking part.'[127]

Even though a destroyer made only occasional visits to the west Cork area by the late 1930s, local residents were familiar with the sight of British sailors. When sailors in Cobh were granted leave, they invariably headed for Cork, usually on a Friday or Saturday night and even as late as 1936, a Garda report noted that despite being in uniform, 'little notice is taken of them'.[128] On another occasion, a party of twenty sailors, all in uniform, spent a day sight-seeing in Killarney and another Garda report stated that they were all well-received by the local population.[129] This was at a time when de Valera was increasing the pressure on the British government for a return of the ports.

Sailors, however, were generally restricted in their movements by limitations on available transport, even after the war. For instance, having accepted an invitation from Midleton College for a team from HMS *Scotsman* to play a cricket match against the college, Lt-Cdr A.E. Buchanan remarked that while Midleton College was no more than five miles from Queenstown, there was no direct access to it by train or bus.[130] He also noted how this meant that he and his crew had little contact with the more inland towns around the coast.

Recreational activities and opportunities to have more contact with local people were more widely available in Cobh. Sport was again the most popular organised activity, with football being the most commonly played sport by garrison teams. Matches were played frequently between teams drawn from each of the forts but garrison teams also played against navy teams when a destroyer was in port, and there were regular matches against local teams, especially Cobh Ramblers FC. Rugby, hockey, and cricket featured too, and there are accounts of matches against Dolphin RFC,

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[127] HMS *Westcott* confidential diary, 6 Mar. 1934 (TNA, ADM 116/2990).
[128] Asst. Commissioner D. MacCoillte to Sec. Dept. of Justice, 3 Nov. 1936 (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[129] Ibid.
[130] Lt-Cdr. A.E. Buchanan, HMS *Warwick* confidential diary, 2-9 June 1933 (TNA, ADM 116/3587).

Sunday's Well RFC, Cobh RFC, Cobh Follies HC and others.[131] On one occasion, a cricket team from Trinity College, Dublin, played a garrison team in Cobh where they were described as 'pleasant young fellows though at first rather nervous, being a little difficult to entertain' and were 'lunched and dined' in the mess.[132]

Other forms of both inter- and intra-services competitions that were frequently held included rifle shooting and rowing, the former being highly rated.[133]

Boxing was another sport that was popular but tournaments were only infrequently organised. On one occasion an invitation was received from Sunnymede BC in Cork for some sailors to take part in one well-publicised tournament that was to be held in Collins Barracks. Three sailors took part and, according to their ship's commander, they and a group of supporters from the ship were all well received by the spectators, while two ship's officers were entertained in the officers' mess.[134]

Another popular recreational activity at both Berehaven and Cobh was dancing, not necessarily for dancing itself, but for the opportunity of meeting girls and according to one report it was equally popular with them. This report states: 'the weekly dances given at the different ports by the other ranks are embarrassingly popular with the native female element.'[135]

A frequently used venue for larger dances in the Cobh area was the States hotel, which overlooked the harbour in Cobh. The Fianna Fáil party held its 'Victory Dance' in the hotel in February 1932 to celebrate the party's success in the general election the previous month,[136] and as the hotel's ownership was in the hands of a German family it must not have been perceived to be especially loyalist in its outlook, despite the number of army and navy events that were held there. Dances were also held in a dance hall located within the grounds of the fort on Spike Island.

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[131] Destroyers in Irish waters, confidential diaries, (TNA, ADM 116/2990), *passim*.
[132] Diary of L.H.C. Meates, 3 July 1929 (Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, KCL, Meates papers 1/8).
[133] 'Historical records of 26th Heavy Battery, Spike Island,' 12 Apr. *1934* (RAM).
[134] Lt-Cdr. G.R.B.Back, HMS *Westcott* confidential diary, 29 Jan. 1934 (TNA, ADM 116/2990).
[135] Report on Irish coast defences, 23 June 1925 (TNA, WO 32/5315).
[136] Lt-Cdr. P.H. Calderon, HMS *Amazon* confidential diary, 21 Jan. 1933 (TNA, ADM 116/2957).

One soldier, a signal man in the Royal Corps of Signals (RCS) who was stationed on Spike Island from 1934 to 1936 has left a graphic description of life and conditions in the fort at the time.[137] He describes dances as being invariably formal in that uniforms were worn which would have been mess kit, or blues, and the ladies dressed equally formally. Music for dancing was provided by a record player, amplifier, and a supply of records that were purchased, and updated, from funds from what was known as PRI [private regimental income];[138] live music was provided only very occasionally, usually by the Royal Artillery band, but the dances were particularly successful when this happened.[139] Contrary to the earlier 1925 report, there was always a problem at these dances with having enough women at them; those who attended were either wives or girls who had been invited by the men and for whom a pass had to be obtained.[140] When the Royal Artillery band visited Spike Island, it also made appearances at Fort Camden and Fort Carlisle. A fourth popular venue was the Royal Cork Yacht Club, on which occasions dress uniform was worn, and it was 'not an unusual occurrence to see its members in dress uniform walking through the town'.[141]

However, soldiers also attended dances at other local venues, usually organised by the local football or hockey club. Another venue for dances in Cobh was a small hall 'for the purpose of supplying some kind of entertainment for the local youth', the main attraction of which was that entrance was only 2*d.* (two pence), but 'they did not rate it any higher than we did.'[142]

Dances which were organised by or on behalf of a destroyer when it was in harbour were larger affairs. One such dance was organised by HMS *Crescent* in Cobh in September 1933 at which over three hundred people were reported to have attended.[143] HMS *Crescent* also organised another such dance two months later which was attended by a similar number of people.[144]

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[137] Ibid.
[138] Signalman R.L. Cartwright, *A chronicle of life in the SICD signals section 1934-1936* (RAM, manuscript MD-1783).
[139] 'Historical records, 26th Heavy Battery, Spike Island', 7 Jul 1934 (RAM).
[140] Cartwright, *A chronicle of life in the SICD signals section 1934-1936* (RAM, manuscript MD-1783).
[141] Asst. Commissioner D. MacCoillte to Sec., Dept. of Justice, 3 Nov. 1936 (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[142] Cartwright, *A chronicle of life in the SICD signals section 1934-1936* (RAM, manuscript MD-1783).
[143] Cdr. P.F.P Wood, HMS *Crescent* confidential diary, 6-12 Sept.1933 (TNA, ADM 116/2957).
[144] Lt-Cdr A. Rolfe, HMS *Cygnet* confidential diary, 31 Oct.-7 Nov. 1933 (TNA, ADM 116/2958).

Dances were frequently held at a port when a destroyer arrived, or was departing, after a tour of duty, a typical one being the farewell dance held in the local Church of Ireland parochial hall in Cobh for the officers and crew of HMS *Westcott.*[145] When HMS *Seawolf* and HMS *Sesame* were due to return to Devonmouth in February 1929, a dance was organised in the States Hotel and invitations were extended to local townspeople. According to the *Irish Times*, 350 of them attended.[146] The frequency of dances is reflected in another report by Lt-Cdr Back in which he stated, on another occasion, that a concert that was given in the garrison gymnasium by his ship's crew 'was followed by the almost inevitable Sergeants' Mess dance.'[147]

One army officer, however, who did not appreciate the dances or much else about his term on Spike Island, was Lt L.H.C. Meates, an officer in the Royal Garrison Artillery who was stationed there for almost two years. At one dance in the Felix Room, organised by the sergeants' mess, he soon left because he was 'feeling bored'.[148] On another occasion he left a dance because of 'hating these functions'.[149] Yet again, at another dance: 'This evening was the great dance, which I cannot be said to have enjoyed, so silly are such functions.'[150] Lt Meates (later Lt-Col) spent most of his leisure time going for long walks during which he spoke to no one, listening to music on the wireless or on records, and drinking tea in the yacht club. Even the Queenstown Regatta, a big social event in the town, did not appeal: 'I did not want to go and mingle with the silly crowd on so fine a day; so I stayed and read my book.'[151] He had little time for any of the local population, describing them as being 'ill-clad loiterers' and 'untidy and somewhat slatternly'. Two of the very few occasions when his equilibrium was disturbed were, once, at Thompson's café where the waitress refused his tip, 'which astonished me, that any waitress should ever refuse a tip', and secondly, when 'I was much incensed

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[145] Lt-Cdr. G.R.B.Back, HMS *Westcott* confidential diary, 24 Apr. 1934 (TNA, ADM 116/2990).
[146] *Irish Times,* 9 Feb. 1929.
[147] Lt-Cdr. G.R.B.Back, HMS *Westcott* confidential diary, 13 Mar. 1934 (TNA, ADM 116/2990).
[148] Diary of G.W. Meates, 21 Jan.1930 (Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, KCL, Meates papers 1/8).
[149] Ibid.,19 Aug.1930 .
[150] Ibid., 28 Aug. 1930.
[151] Ibid., 15 Jul. 1929.

by my servant missing the boat [from Cobh] and so omitting to get my bath or light my fire.'[152]

In his final report before leaving for England, Lt-Cdr Back, of HMS *Westcott*, gave his opinion that despite the ever-increasing political desire in the country to effect a complete break with Britain, English visitors to Ireland still received a warm welcome from the people and there was no need for them to fear for their safety.[153] Signalman Cartwright's account of his stay also indicated that the tension felt by British forces in 1932 and 1933, created by the increase in public sentiment and de Valera's rise to power had abated considerably by 1934 when he was posted to Ireland, because he describes a relationship with locals in both Cobh and Cork that was relatively easy-going and free of tension. Whenever they had a weekend off, soldiers would go to Cork and occasionally stay at a small inexpensive hotel, the Bandon, and enjoy the city's entertainment. As Cartwright describes it:

> Most of the local folk knew we were British soldiers from Spike Island. Though always in civilian clothes it would have been impossible to conceal our true identity. We played them at sport. Some married Irish girls. There was no division between Catholics and Protestants. Life was peaceful. I cannot recall at any time experiencing a sense of disquiet or apprehension.[154]

In 1936, seven non-commissioned soldiers stationed at Spike Island were recorded as living with their families in Cobh, travelling each day in uniform by War Department launch to and from Fort Westmoreland, without experiencing any problems from the local population. Soldiers on daily or weekend pass, however, of whom there were about thirty every day, always wore civilian clothes when travelling beyond the immediate area of Cobh.[155] An informal arrangement had been agreed between Major General Brennan, O/C Southern Command and Col. Haywood, O/C British forces in Cobh and Berehaven, in 1924 that British troops in the Cork forts would not travel in uniform outside a defined line that extended about a mile inland.[156]

Officers in both the army and the navy had a much more varied lifestyle than the men they commanded. They also engaged in sport, but not the team

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[152] Ibid., 17 & 23 Mar. 1929.
[153] Lt-Cdr. G.R.B.Back, HMS *Westcott* confidential diary, 30 Apr. 1934 (TNA, ADM 116/2990).
[154] Cartwright, *A chronicle of life in the SICD signals section 1934-1936* (RAM, manuscript MD-1783).
[155] Asst. Commissioner D. MacCoillte to Sec. Dept. of Justice, 3 Nov. 1936 (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[156] Chief Supt. Cork to Commissioner, 22 Oct. 1928 (NAI, JUS 8/382).

sports the other ranks played. Golf was by far the most popular sport engaged in by officers, and as well as there being a golf course on army ground on Bere Island and at Buncrana (created by the soldiers) the army on Spike Island also made a course in 1933, with the help of nine naval ratings from HMS *Cygnet* for a week.[157] The popularity of golf among officers was attested to by an American war correspondent who was based in Queenstown and Berehaven for an extended period during the war:

> No notice of Queenstown, no history of the navy would be complete without a word about golf. It is *the* navy game. Golf clubs are to be found in every cabin; in the tiny libraries, Harry Vardon rubs shoulders with naval historians and professors of thermodynamics. If you take the train, you are sure to find a carriage full of golfers bound for a course on the home side of the river.[158]

Officers also enjoyed a more varied and agreeable social lifestyle than the other ranks. The Royal Cork Yacht Club had a long and close association with the Royal Navy whose officers continued to enjoy honorary membership of the club, and whenever a destroyer docked in Cobh the club became the next port of call for any off-duty officers. The County Club in Cork city was another home from home. It was a gentlemen's club and it too had a long association with both the navy and the army that continued until they departed in 1938. Members of the club were, in the main, retired army and navy officers, and members of the legal profession. The club was very accommodating to all visiting army and naval officers, and they undoubtedly felt comfortable there. One destroyer commander who was stationed in Cobh for several months wrote in his final report before returning to England that the club 'maintains a loyalty and dignity that is outstanding.'[159] The club's rules of membership stated that 'The commander of the Forces in Ireland and his staff, and the Admiral on the Irish station shall be considered Honorary Members of the club', and even when the rules were changed in 1927 to take account of changing circumstances they still reflected the traditional affinity that existed: 'The committee shall have the power to admit as Honorary

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[157] Lt-Cdr A. Rolfe, HMS *Cygnet* confidential diary, 7-12 Nov. 1933 (TNA, ADM 116/2958).
[158] Beston, *Full speed ahead*, p. 94.
[159] Cdr W.N. Beckett, HMS *Westcott* confidential diary, 23 Aug. 1933 (TNA, ADM 116/2957).

Members of the Club Officers of His Majesties Ships, Regiments, and/or garrisons from time to time stationed in or arriving at the County of Cork'.[160]

The other club which kept an open-door policy for officers was Rushbrooke Tennis Club whose courts and facilities were widely used by many officers. The memory of this relationship is retained to this day by continued competition for at least one trophy that was presented to the club by a grateful officer.[161]

Formal dining was an integral part of the life of both army and naval officers. The officers' mess on Spike Island regularly entertained officers from other forts as guests to dinner, and officers from a destroyer in the harbour would invariably be invited to dine. These invitations would, of course, be reciprocated on board ship. In addition, invitations were extended to, and received from, other local personages. One of the most prominent of these was a Mrs Violet Bryce who owned an extensive property on Garinish Island. Her property included the world-renowned garden on the island that was started by her husband, and which she continued to develop after his death in 1923.[162] Over the years she lavishly entertained officers and men to receptions and 'at homes'; made tennis courts and swimming pool available to them; and organised dances for them on the island. Whenever a vessel called to Glengarriff the officers usually paid their respects to her and frequently invited her to dinner onboard ship.[163]

Glengarriff was also the site of the Eccles Hotel, a venue that was very popular with ships' crews, and many dances were held there over the years in its ballroom.[164] The hotel had had a long association with British military, and it was leased to the War Office from 1918 to 1920 and used as a convalescent home by officers who were recovering from the trauma of the First World War.[165] In fact, a second hotel in Glengarriff, Roche's Hotel, had also been used as a convalescent home for officers during the war. One officer who had been a patient there, and who fully appreciated his good fortune to be able to

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[160] Minutes of Cork County Club 28 Feb. 1917 and 15 Oct. 1927 (CCA, manuscript U606).
[161] Personal communication, Frank McDonnell, Rushbrooke Tennis Club, Oct. 2010.
[162] History of Garinish Island (www.glengarriff.ie) (accessed 25 Aug. 2010).
[163] Cdr.W.N. Beckett, HMS *Amazon* confidential diary, 23 Jul-15 Aug. 1933 (TNA, ADM 116/2957); Lt-Cdr A.N. Rolfe, HMS *Cygnet* confidential diary, 13-21 Nov. 1933 (TNA, ADM 116/2858), *et al.*
[164] Cdr. H. Hayes, HMS *Vanquisher*, confidential diary, 19-26 Dec. 1933 (TNA, ADM 116/2958) *et al.*
[165] History of Eccles Hotel (www.eccleshotel.com) (accessed 25 Aug. 2010).

recuperate in the idyllic surroundings of Glengarriff, also wrote that the hotel was 'run by the famous Mrs A.B', and added the comment that 'only a small proportion of my fellow officers are vile.'[166] The hotel had had an even deeper connection with the military because one historian has noted that one of the three known secret agents in Co. Cork was 'one James Flynn, a Catholic from a staunch loyalist family, whose mother was the proprietor of Roche's Hotel in Glengarriff: she had been legendary for her "unavailing kindness and hospitality" towards Royal Navy officers while they were stationed in Cobh and Berehaven.'[167]

The general impression of life in the ports in the years following independence was one of dull routine punctuated by training exercises, sporting occasions, and enlivened by the arrival of patrolling destroyers, although these visits became less frequent by the middle and late 1930s. The soldiers and sailors were generally well accepted by the local people with whom they came into contact and were, perhaps, either ignored or tolerated by others with whom they had little or no contact. The conditions under which the soldiers in the Cobh area lived were generally better than those in the two other ports. In Cobh the soldiers had easy access to more amenities, especially in Cork city, than their colleagues in Lough Swilly and Bere Island. The garrison on Bere Island was particularly isolated and the weather in winter was a common cause of complaint. The long association that had existed between both the army and navy in all three ports undoubtedly contributed significantly to their being accepted locally, and creating a situation whereby friction and antagonism between them was considerably less than it might have been had the garrisons been located elsewhere.

In one incident, in 1936, the commander of HMS *Scotsman* was asked by the local Church of Ireland rector in Cobh to land a party of seamen to attend a service on Remembrance Sunday in his church. Before agreeing, Lt-Cdr A. Buchanan had a word with the local Garda superintendent for his views. Buchanan was advised that there would be no objection to the men walking to the church but if it was intended that they would march, the superintendent would have to seek permission, which he expected would be

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[166] Ireland, *From the Irish shore*, p. 31.
[167] McMahon, *British spies and Irish rebels*, p. 344.

refused. Buchanan decided that the difference between walking and marching might not be sufficiently clear so he did not land the men, despite being assured by the superintendent that the people of 'Queenstown' would not object.[168] Buchanan also quoted an episode during the previous month in which a party of soldiers from Spike Island 'passed through Cork armed' apparently without incident but which 'drew complaints from official quarters in Dublin.'[169] However, a Garda report from the same time contradicts this account by stating that:

> Each year a party of about forty sailors in uniform, under the command of an officer, attend a commemoration service held in Cobh Protestant Church, in connection with Armistice Day. They march to and from the church, but there is no display of drill or arms.[170]

British sailors in uniform were a familiar sight in the ports' areas. For instance, whenever a destroyer was anchored offshore in Berehaven, sailors were usually granted some shore leave to visit the mainland. Sailors always wore uniform when doing so but officers changed into civilian clothes. This was also standard practice when destroyers were anchored off Glengarriff and Bantry.[171]

The policies of the army and navy towards the wearing of uniforms after 1922 is an indication of the welcome that sailors received when they visited ports around the country. In 1922, the War Office issued an order for soldiers on leave in Ireland to wear civilian clothes.[172] This would have been a prudent move in 1922 during the Civil War but by 1925 this was found to be unnecessary so the order was rescinded. These orders, however, did not apply to Royal Navy sailors. They were allowed, even encouraged, to wear their uniforms when on shore leave, and as late as 1937, six sailors were known to have worn their uniforms during their Christmas leave at their home addresses.[173] At the same time there was a complaint that some soldiers of the

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[168] Lt-Cdr. A. Buchanan, HMS *Scotsman* confidential diary, 4 – 10 Nov. 1936 (TNA, ADM 116/3587). The use of the name 'Queenstown' appears frequently in British civil service, army, and navy records throughout the 1920s and 1930s, despite the name being changed to Cobh very soon after independence.
[169] Ibid. Buchanan refers to his diary of 15 Oct 1936 in which he described this episode but, unfortunately, a copy of the report is not in the file.
[170] Commissioner to Sec., Dept. of Justice, 3 Nov. 1938 (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[171] Asst. Commissioner D. MacCoillte to Sec., Dept of Justice, 3 Nov. 1938 (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[172] War Office to GOC-in-C, Ireland, 29 Sept. 1922 (TNA, CO 739/11).
[173] Dulanty to Batterbee, Dominions Office, 11 Jan. 1937 (TNA, DO 35/892/3).

Irish Guards were seen in uniform in Dublin in 1937.[174] Batterbee, in the Dominions Office, wrote to the Admiralty about the practice and asked for sailors to be required to wear civilian clothes when in Ireland[175] but he got a frosty reply in return. J.S. Barnes informed him that all restrictions on sailors wearing uniform had been lifted in 1924 (although they were imposed on Royal Marines in 1927 because their uniform could be mistaken for an army uniform) because there had been no ill-feeling towards sailors in southern ports and that no difficulty had ever been reported.[176] He concluded by stating that 'we do not think it necessary to alter the existing arrangements.' The practice was eventually banned in December 1939 when the Irish government issued an order banning the wearing of military uniforms by all except members of the Irish Defence Forces.[177]

This reaction by civilians to British soldiers and sailors in uniform is a measure of how servicemen were treated by local populations in streets and towns, not just in the ports' areas, but throughout the country. This is a matter to which Gardaí had been ordered to pay attention throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The Department of Defence had issued 'General Routine Order No. 44' on 23 July 1923, and reissued it in 1931, stating that:

> Individual officers and other ranks belonging to the British Army may in the course of private business and on furlough, visit this country wearing British military uniform. It should be understood that there are no restrictions on their doing so, and they should not be interfered with on the grounds of wearing such uniform.[178]

The Department of Justice confirmed later, in a letter to the Garda Commissioner Eoin O'Duffy, that there 'is no legally enforceable prohibition against wearing in the Irish Free State the naval, military, or police uniform of another country.'[179] Gardaí were informed that they could not arrest anyone for wearing such uniforms. They were, however, instructed to approach anyone doing so, take down whatever details they could obtain, advise the person to wear mufti, to 'take all precautions for the safety of the individual

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[174] Ibid.
[175] Batterbee to Barnes, Admiralty, 21 Jan. 1937 (TNA, DO 35/892/3).
[176] Barnes to Batterbee, 24 Feb. 1937 (TNA, DO 35/872/3).
[177] *The Times*, 5 Dec. 1939 (TNA, DO 1107/14).
[178] General Routine Order No. 44, 23 July 1923 (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[179] E. Ó Frighil to Garda Commissioner, 10 July 1925 (NAI, JUS 8/363).

concerned,' and to report all incidents to the Commissioner through the regular channels.[180]

Gardaí throughout the country did so during the inter-war years. A wide number of these reports are still on file, but the overall number in relation to the many thousands of Irishmen serving in the British forces at the time is very small.[181] The majority of reports were generated by Gardaí on routine patrol in their areas; only a tiny fraction were generated by complaints from local people.

Soldiers and sailors wore their uniforms for different reasons, but a consistency emerges from the reports:

- They either did not possess civilian clothes, or they did not have any with them. This applied particularly to sailors who were obliged to wear uniform when on shore leave overseas.
- They were unaware that they should not wear uniform, or they had not been told that they should not (most Irish soldiers were advised by their regiments that they should not wear uniform when on leave at home).
- They were proud to wear their uniform and wanted to show off to their friends.

Many soldiers on home leave did not possess civilian clothes and those who agreed to change had to borrow clothes from members of their families. Purchasing a set of clothes to wear for a couple of weeks leave was not a reasonable option for most men. Others simply refused to change and continued to wear uniform throughout the leave, even wearing it to Mass.

The reports also show a pattern of tolerance by both Gardaí and local people towards Irishmen wearing British uniforms, not only within the environs of the ports, but throughout the country. Most of the reports contain comments by the local sergeant, superintendent or chief superintendent along the lines that they did not expect the soldier/sailor to be 'interfered with', 'molested', or that their appearance in public would cause a 'disturbance', or 'breach of the peace'. Nevertheless, most such comments also carried a rider

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[180] E. O'Duffy, Commissioner, 'Routine Order 17 to all officers and stations', 17 July 1925 (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[181] Department of Justice files 'Wearing of uniforms' (NAI, JUS 8/382; JUS 8/363).

that the local Gardaí would keep a careful watch on the servicemen during their stay just in case they did get into trouble.

Very few incidents of 'disturbance' were reported but probably the most serious was an attack against two brothers, Thomas and Peter Dwyer, aged 13 and 12 years respectively, two Royal Navy boy sailors who were on leave at their parents' home at 15 Nallymullen, Tralee after six months at a naval training school in London. One evening, Thomas was set upon by a man and four youths, stated to be members of Fianna Éireann, who tore his uniform and ran off with his cap and collar. The five were later apprehended, charged and fined for their behaviour.[182]

Against this, three boy sailors and two able-bodied seamen regularly wore uniforms while on leave in Wexford town later that year without any problems. The Garda report stated that 'The appearance of these men in uniform has not and is not anticipated to lead to any disturbance or breach of the peace.'[183]

Nevertheless, under pressure from the Irish government, the War Office re-issued its circular of 1927 to all army commands reinforcing the advice of the undesirability of soldiers wearing uniform while on leave in Ireland.[184] The practice came to a halt in 1939 under the Emergency Powers Order which prohibited the wearing of military uniforms other than by members of the Irish Defence Forces. The order was strictly enforced and plain clothes Gardaí were constantly on duty at Carlisle Pier, Dunlaoire to enforce the order, with authority to search anyone suspected of wearing uniform under an overcoat.[185] Gardaí were also instructed that any servicemen who were unable to change into civilian clothes were not to be allowed to disembark.[186]

The response of republican activists and politicians towards the presence of British military in the ports throughout the period was notably muted. The IRA command in Cork had been the most belligerent and violent in the country during the War of Independence, and was among the most antagonistic towards terms of the treaty. During the war, hundreds of men

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[182] Supt. J.J. Kelleher, Tralee to Commissioner, 11 Feb. 1936 (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[183] Chief Supt. M. Lynch, Waterford, 31 Dec. 1936 (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[184] J.P. Walshe, External Affairs to Sec. Dept. of Justice, 7 Nov. 1936 (NAI, JUS 8/382).
[185] Dep. Commissioner to Commissioner, 18 April 1940; Irish Press 2 Dec. 1940 (NAI, JUS 8/363).
[186] Chief Supt. P. Carroll , routine order 7 Dec. 1939 (NAI, JUS 8/363).

were imprisoned on Spike Island and on Bere Island, and during the truce they engaged in several pitched battles with their captors, wrecking the place in the process. But, after the treaty had been signed, they showed no interest in the defended ports, directing their attention to the other terms of the treaty that were much more important to them. As Peter Hart describes it: 'After this [the departure of the British Army from Cork] only the naval bases at Bere and Spike Island were left, irrelevant to the coming civil war.'[187]

During the following fifteen years there was just one serious attack on British soldiers and civilians as the disembarked at Cobh in March 1924 (see chapter 5), and this was the only attack on any military or naval personnel until the murder of Admiral Boyle Somerville in 1936. It is significant that this murder had no connection with the British occupation of the forts but was carried out on the excuse that Somerville was actively recruiting local boys to join the navy. The forts ceased to be a focus of attention for nationalist sentiment during the years of the treaty. The oath, sovereignty, and partition were more important matters. One historian who has analysed IRA activities at this time describes how, from the mid-1920s, 'the IRA began to target what it considered to be symbols of British imperialism in the Free State [such as]...Poppy Day...British Legion halls...Boy Scout huts...display of Union Jacks[188],' actions that were supported by the new Fianna Fáil party.[189] Hanley also refers to one association between these incidents and the British presence in the ports when he describes the anti-Poppy Day protests in 1929 being hailed a success by *The Nation* newspaper and being evidence that the 'Garrisons day is passing'.[190]

A number of Cork and Donegal IRA leaders later joined the Fianna Fáil party and were elected as TDs in the 1927 election and in 1933. It is surprising, though, how little any of them had to say in the Dáil about the Treaty Ports during their years as TDs. Seven Fianna Fáil TDs were elected in the Cork constituencies in 1927 and in 1933. In Donegal, two Fianna Fáil TDs were elected in 1927, increasing to four in 1933. None of them made any serious contribution in any Dáil debate about the forts and the British

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[187] Hart, *The IRA and its enemie*, p. 112.
[188] Brian Hanley, *The IRA, 1926-36* (Dublin, 2002), p. 71.
[189] Ibid., p. 120
[190] Ibid.

presence in them. Hugo Flinn, a Cork TD, in a debate on external affairs referred to them as being an obstacle to the state being able to describe itself as sovereign,[191] and years later in a debate on dominion status in which he compared Ireland's situation with that of Canada and South Africa.[192] Of the Donegal TDs throughout the ten years only one, Frank Carney, made any reference to them, in a debate on merchant shipping, but, again only as an example of the country's lack of complete sovereignty.[193] Most surprising of all, Martin Corry, 'a bitter political partisan and outspoken backbencher'[194] with a reputation for blunt speaking, made just one reference to the ports during these years.[195] Speaking in the same debate as Carney, he pointed out the incongruity of a possible situation which could see Britain being at war and British forces firing on an enemy from the defended ports. This was a rational point that could have been made by a member of any political party in the Dáil.

Most of the TDs' parliamentary contributions over the years were about local issues. None of them made any sustained attack on the actual British occupation of the forts. They used the forts as part of wider arguments about the country's lack of complete sovereignty and in support of complaints about partition and other related matters. The thesis has not examined the economic benefits that accrued to the local economies, but it would of interest to know how much the supply of fresh food and supplies to about 1000 troops and their families meant to local suppliers. It may well have contributed to the widespread acceptance of the troops and sailors locally and to the absence of attacks on them or their military equipment. This could not be said of the Lough Swilly garrison as their supplies were drawn from Derry so they suffered no serious loss of business.

For most of the inter-war years the Treaty Ports were no more than a backdrop to everyday life in the localities. For people who lived away from the ports they were not a factor in their daily lives and did not generate either good or bad feelings towards them. The relative isolation of Bere Island and

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[191] Hugo Flinn *Dáil Éireann deb.*, 21 Nov. 1928. vol. 27, col. 470.
[192] Hugo Flinn *Dáil Éireann deb.*, 19 Dec. 1934, vol. 54, col. 1702.
[193] Frank Carney, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, 20 Mar 1930, vol. 33, col. 2290.
[194] Patrick Maume, 'Corry, Martin John', in James McGuire and James Quinn (ed.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).
[195] Martin Corry, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, 20 Mar 1930, vol. 33, col. 2292.

Dunree garrisons was a contributing factor and meant that social contact was largely limited to organised activities such as excursions, dances, and sports events. To a lesser extent, forts Carlisle, Templebreedy, and even Camden, were also isolated, but the main fort on Spike Island was not, and it had regular and easy access to Cobh and Cork city. Yet, with the one exception of the attack on the War Office launch at Cobh, there are no records of attacks on any of the forts, nor even serious public outcry against them, during their years as Treaty Ports. During the early 1930s the military in the forts did become apprehensive that rising nationalist sentiment would result in an attack on one or more of the forts, but this never materialised. Nevertheless, British troops, whether in uniform or civilian clothes, were an accepted part of the localities for most of this period. It is clear, though, that the sports in which service personnel engaged with local teams, and the venues at which many local dances were held, indicate that most of the organised socialising was with Protestants and loyalists, especially in Cork. Army and navy officers socialised almost exclusively within these circles.

Another factor in the relationship between the two sides was commercial. While the army, and navy when it was in port, drew their hard rations from depots in England, fresh food and supplies had to be purchased locally. This ensured very worthwhile business for milk suppliers, bakeries, and butchers who supplied the forts. In addition, the discretionary spending by the troops and sailors in pubs and restaurants was also a welcome source of income to the town. The attempts by local organisations in Berehaven and Dunree to have Royal Navy ships and flotillas visit their towns is evidence of how highly the custom was valued.

Some evidence of what little antagonism, or even indifference, was shown to British service personnel was the reaction of the Cork and Donegal Fianna Fáil TDs towards them. Throughout their years in the Dáil, the TDs had little to say about the British presence in the ports and made no concerted protest against them. While they may have resented the occupation of the ports ideologically, the presence of the troops was not of major practical significance to their political activities.

Consequently, instead of there being a universal antipathy towards the British soldiers and the forts, a picture emerges of a fairly widespread acceptance of their presence that extended even beyond the immediate vicinities of the forts.

10. Changing times: the return of de Valera

During the first ten years of independence the relationship between the British and Irish governments was harmonious. Despite the irritants of the oath of allegiance to the king and his acceptance as head of state that continued to arouse anger, W.T. Cosgrave and his cabinet made practical progress in their workings with the British government. The British government, in turn, was satisfied how Ireland was operating under its new status as a dominion of the British Empire, albeit with some reluctance. The treaty ports had not proved to be a particularly contentious issue during these years and, apart from the five year review, no serious change in their status was foreseen.

De Valera's election success in 1932, with the help of Labour, changed this state of affairs. The comfortable relationship that had existed was replaced by mounting friction as de Valera set about dismantling the treaty. Among his first acts was the abolition of the oath, followed by a refusal to continue to pay the land annuities to Britain and, later, his campaign for the return of the ports. His action in going to the country within months of taking office was justified by Fianna Fáil being returned to government without the need of the Labour Party. This stronger mandate allowed him to increase the pressure on the British government. He continued by abolishing the right to appeal to the Privy Council, and by emasculating the role of the Governor-General and treating the office as a nonentity. The British government responded to these acts with trade sanctions on Irish goods and produce, which prompted Irish sanctions on British imports. The six years after 1932 were a period when relations between the two governments were marked by bitterness and hostility that were not in evidence during the years of the Cosgrave governments. The disputes over the land annuities, the oath, and other individual points of dispute were not, in themselves, the problems. They were manifestations of the change that had occurred in the public's perception of the treaty and the position of Ireland in the British Empire. In 1922, the majority of the population welcomed the treaty and what it meant but by 1933, de Valera's nationalist aspirations had found favour with the majority and complete independence from Britain was now the desired goal. In this new scenario, the treaty ports began to take on a new significance. For the Irish government the presence of British military forces on Irish territory was a

visual reminder that its independence was not total and that the same military presence undermined the state's status as a neutral country. In Britain the thought of the possible loss of the treaty ports again alarmed Whitehall because of the perceived gap it would create in Britain's defences.

The issue of Irish neutrality at this time is too wide-ranging a subject to be dealt with in any depth in this thesis. It has implications that extend beyond the confines of the treaty ports, all of which have been covered in recent times by others.[1] It is enough to say that it would have been incongruous for the British Army to remain in control of all major coastal defences on the island, and for the Royal Navy to have both open access to the ports and free movement in Irish territorial waters, while, at the same time, the country was declaring itself to be a neutral state. No country that became engaged in war with Britain would have had the slightest hesitation in exploiting this incongruity if it suited their purpose. This was the predicament behind de Valera's constant endeavours to have Britain vacate the ports. With no navy, an ill-equipped and under-strength army to defend the country, together with a population that had not the slightest inclination to fight alongside Britain, he had little alternative to neutrality.

The growing popularity of de Valera and Fianna Fáil in 1931 raised concerns in London and the government set up a new committee of senior government ministers, known as the Irish Situation Committee, on 24 March 1932 to deal with the changed circumstances in Ireland.[2] The committee was so concerned about the situation that between its inaugural meeting on 7 April and its last meeting of the year on 4 December it met on nineteen occasions.[3] At its first meeting the committee considered a memorandum by the General Staff on the defence of the forts. This advised that some plans had been drawn up to provide reinforcements to be sent to Ireland at short notice, with or without the support of the Irish government, in the event of attacks. It was planned that a battalion of infantry would be sent without delay – but they were faced with the problem that the reinforcements would have to be in

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[1] O'Halpin, *Spying on Ireland;* Girvin, *The emergency neutral Ireland 1939-45*; Dwyer, *Behind the green curtain*; Wills, *That neutral island;* Girvin and Roberts (eds.), *Ireland and the Second World War*; Keogh, *Ireland and Europe, 1919-1989*; Fisk, *In time of war: Ireland, Ulster.*

[2] Memorandum on composition and terms of reference of ISC, 24 Mar. 1932 (TNA, CAB 27/525).

[3] Proceedings of ISC (32), n.d. (TNA, CAB 27/523).

place before any attack occurred, and this could not be done for constitutional reasons, and so the reinforcements would be of no use to the garrisons after an attack had begun.[4] Without these reinforcements, the garrisons would not have been able to resist an organised attack, with Berehaven being particularly exposed because of the scattered nature of the army's buildings.[5] Expenditure on the forts had been 'cut to the minimum' over the years, and the War Office took the opportunity of re-stating its opinion that it 'would be glad for the occupation to come to an end' – although adding that it was for the Admiralty to take any such decision.[6]

The Admiralty took exception to the War Office's attitude and in a subsequent memorandum to the ISC made it clear that nothing should be done that might prejudice their position under the treaty, and that in a war, the ports would be indispensable both for convoy escort duty and as strategic bases for the navy in the North Atlantic.[7] The Admiralty further pointed out that if the Irish Free State were hostile to Britain in time of war it would be impossible to ensure the safe passage of supplies to and from Britain.[8]

The CID, in a review of imperial defence in 1928, had highlighted how the neglect of all defended ports around Britain had left the coastline defences woefully inadequate.[9] In the wide-ranging review, that covered the whole empire, it was stated that the lack of expenditure over the years meant that much of the empire's defences were inadequate. Of the home ports, Berehaven was specifically identified as having defences that were unsatisfactory if the ports were to be needed. The Chiefs of Staff voiced the same opinion about Berehaven in 1933, including it with similar concerns over bases in Malta, Gibraltar and Sierra Leone.[10]

Later, the problem for the Admiralty was exacerbated by their ideological differences with the RAF over the future of coastal defence. In fact, by 1932 they were at loggerheads over the matter. While the Admiralty accepted that air forces had a role to play 'when they can be made available',

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[4] Minutes of ISC meeting, 7 Apr. 1932 (TNA, CAB 27/525).
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Admiralty memorandum to ISC, 7 May 1932 (TNA, CAB 27/525).
[8] Ibid.
[9] COS review of imperial defence, July 1928 (TNA, CAB 24/198).
[10] COS annual review of imperial defence, 10 Nov. 1933 (TNA, CAB 24/244).

they also stated that 'beyond that point, there is a great divergence of opinion', and believed that a greater threat came from heavily armed capital ships and modern aircraft carriers.[11] They refused to accept the RAF position that aircraft ought to replace big guns as the basic weapon of coastal defence, and their conclusion, that 'the older services regard this proposal as unsound and unsafe,'[12] is an indication that the RAF was still regarded as an upstart that should know better than to challenge the established services.

The cabinet was informed at a meeting on 22 June 1932 that while an attack on Ulster was not anticipated, it was 'not improbable' that the internal situation in the Irish Free State might seriously deteriorate after the close of the Eucharistic Congress in Dublin.[13] It was pointed out that, in this connection, the British garrisons at the reserved ports were not in a position to defend themselves against any serious, organised attack, and that it was questionable whether the Garda Síochána would be able to deal with an attack.[14]

The committee's 5 August meeting was attended by eight high-ranking military and naval personnel (the RAF was not consulted) and civil servants in addition to six regular members of the committee.[15] This meeting dealt exclusively with the perceived possibility of hostile action by 'revolutionary bodies (especially the Irish Republican Army)' against the defences of the reserved ports or against the Northern Ireland frontier. It was decided that immediate reinforcements for the forts would be unwise, for political reasons, but plans were agreed for reinforcements to be provided at twelve hours' notice. The committee was again faced with the dilemma that, constitutionally, the Irish government was responsible for the landward defences of the forts. While the committee recognised this, it was decided that in the event of information being received that the forts were being threatened by the IRA they would inform the Irish government, but they would take whatever action they deemed necessary 'with discretion' and would 'inform the

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[11] Admiralty memorandum to CID, 11 July 1932 (TNA, ADM 24/231).
[12] Ibid.
[13] Minutes of cabinet meeting, 22 June 1932 (TNA, CAB 23/71).
[14] Ibid.
[15] Minutes of ISC meeting, 5 Aug. 1932 (TNA, CAB 27/523).

Irish Free State contemporaneously' with the action but without giving any details.[16]

The British authorities were constantly being spooked by rumours of gun-running at this time and this added to their fears of attack on the forts. These fears were aggravated by British inability to intercept and search any vessels in Irish waters suspected of gun-running, and they knew that the Irish government would not give them permission to carry out any searches.[17] None of these fears were realised but as de Valera continued with his demands, relations between the two governments deteriorated and the tariff wars that each country had instigated against the other began to affect both countries adversely. De Valera had begun urging for the return of the ports from 1932 even though, as one historian has concluded, he had not fully enunciated his overall defence policy, nor had he as yet been fully committed to a policy of neutrality, which was later to become the central argument in favour of Britain evacuating them.[18]

During the early 1930s, little concern was expressed in the Dáil over the ports although other matters relating to the treaty were frequently aired. Desmond FitzGerald raised the issue on 3 May 1932, arguing that the Irish Free State was honour-bound to observe the terms of the treaty and that the only way to regain the ports was by agreement with the British government: it could not be achieved by demanding the British to leave.[19] Osmond Ormonde again raised the matter in 1934 in a speech in which he chastised de Valera for refusing to make any statement on national defence and for 'funking his duty' to take over the responsibility for defending the country's coastline and for wasting money on a 'political army' rather than investing it in coastal defence and the nucleus of an Irish navy.[20] De Valera took up the question some weeks later when he reiterated the country's right not to be involved in a war that was not of its own choosing, and that British occupation of the ports would inevitably involve the country in any war in which Britain became

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[16] Minutes of ISC meeting, 5 Aug. 1932 (TNA, CAB 27/523).
[17] Lord Sankey, memorandum to cabinet, 25 Aug. 1932 (TNA, CAB 24/232).
[18] McMahon, *Republicans and Imperialists*, p. 154. This is the most comprehensive analysis of Anglo-Irish relations in the seven years leading to World War 2.
[19] Desmond FitzGerald, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, xli, col. 1168, 3 May 1932.
[20] Osmond Ormonde, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, li, col. 1668, 11 Apr. 1934.

involved.[21] He returned to the subject some days later when he adverted that British occupation of the ports denied the Ireland the neutrality it claimed, adding that even though Canada, Australia, and South Africa would theoretically be at war if Britain was at war, they actually had a degree of neutrality that was denied to Ireland by virtue of not having British forces occupying their countries.[22]

In his direct communications with the British government, de Valera used every opportunity to exert pressure for the return of the ports and the departure of all British military personnel. In May 1935 he made an explicit statement giving assurances to Britain that a foreign power would never be allowed to use the Irish Free State as launching pad for an attack on Britain:

> I can say that so long as this Government is in office ... that our territory will never be permitted to be used as a base for attack upon Britain. We are going to get our own independence of Britain but we are not going...to allow our territory, under any conditions whatever, to be made use of by some foreign power as the basis of attack against Britain. We give that assurance.[23]

He repeated this assurance the following year with a further guarantee, 'as far as guarantees can be given', that the Irish Free State would spend whatever was necessary to ensure its defences were capable of resisting attack.[24] These assurances were repeated many times in later years.[25] In fact, de Valera had made it clear to Anthony Eden in October 1935, through Joseph Walshe, that he would be prepared to spend whatever money was necessary to upgrade the ports' defences, and to do this in consultation with British military experts, in the expectation that this would also incur expenditure on the purchase of destroyers, the number of which was not indicated.[26] The War Office carried out a review of the cost of modernising the forts which indicated that the overall cost would be £400,000, as well as annual maintenance charges of £162,000.[27] Three years later, the estimated

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[21] Eamon de Valera, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lii, col. 2700, 8 June 1934.
[22] Eamon de Valera, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, liii, col. 136, 2 June 1934.
[23] Eamon de Valera, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lvi, col. 2116, 29 May 1935.
[24] McDonald to Inskip, 3 July 1936 (TNA, CAB 104/20); Eamon de Valera, *Dáil Éireann deb..*, lxii, col. 2660, 18 June 1936.
[25] *Dáil Eireann deb..*, lxxxi, cc 583-586 *et al*, 7 Nov. 1940.
[26] Anthony Eden, note on meeting with Joseph Walshe, 15 Oct. 1935 (TNA, CAB 24/262).
[27] Minutes of COS sub-committee meeting, 6 July 1936 (TNA, CAB 53/6).

capital cost had increased to £650,000 (which included new 9.2" guns) and that annual maintenance costs would be £225,000.[28]

At this time, the Admiralty completed a review of naval defences and noted that as the North Sea was no longer being considered as the most important strategic area in home waters the fleet anchorages used in the last war were no longer suitable. It also pointed out that Berehaven was the

> only anchorage of the necessary capacity which is outside the normal range of air attacks from French shore bases, and is at the same time sufficiently well placed for operating both in the channel and the North Atlantic, will form the new Fleet anchorage.[29]

Nevertheless, for the first time, the Admiralty's thinking on the ports began to undergo change. At a meeting of the COS sub-committee just three months later, Vice Admiral James explained that change had come about by a 're-orientation' of their defence policy that had modified the importance they had attached to the ports and that they were now willing to relinquish their control over them. One interpretation of this was that the Admiralty no longer considered France to be the next foe in a European war.[30]

This did not mean that the ports were no longer of importance in their defence plans. James emphasised that while control could be ceded to the Irish Free State, the Admiralty must still retain the right of access to them whenever necessary and that the Admiralty would still provide their main defence.[31] He also emphasised that air facilities at the defended ports had received little consideration but that, now, they must be included in any new arrangements. Field Marshall Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd took advantage of the opportunity of repeating the War Office's position, stating that it 'would be only too glad to withdraw their personnel from the ports'.[32]

The subject of the ports was only ever raised as a secondary issue in other Dáil debates, sometimes when army estimates were being discussed. British occupation of the ports was not of any great consequence to most Dáil

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[28] War Office memorandum 19 Jan. 1938 (TNA, CAB 104/21).
[29] Admiralty review of defence of ports at home and abroad, Nov. 1935 (TNA, ADM 116/3380).
[30] Paul Canning, 'Yet another failure for appeasement: the case of the Irish ports' in *The International History Review*, vol. 4 (Aug. 1982), p. 377.
[31] Minutes of COS sub-committee meeting, 4 Feb. 1936 (TNA, CAB 53/5); memorandum by COS sub-committee, 4 Feb. 1935 (TNA, CAB 53/527).
[32] Ibid.

deputies or to the public at large. One Dáil debate illustrates this perfectly. In a debate on external affairs in June 1936, on one of the few occasions in which the ports were seriously debated, James Dillon (then a Centre Party TD for Donegal) stated:[33]

> Britain has certain accommodation in two ports in this country...nobody in this country gives two hoots about the ports. Ninety five per cent of the people know nothing about what ports are occupied...Can you tell me where are the two ports in this country which are occupied by the British?

When he was heckled by a deputy informing him there were three ports, he replied:

> I did not know there were three. I venture to say that not ten percent of the president's party know where these three ports are and, as far as the people at large are concerned, not one percent of the people could tell him. I know where two are [one was in his own constituency] but where the third is I have not the faintest idea, and I do not care.

Dillon's contribution came in the middle of a long debate, and even allowing for a degree of rhetoric in the speech, it is indicative of the level of importance that was attached to the ports, at that time, by both politicians and the general public.

De Valera was becoming more and more conscious of the anomaly of the Irish Free State claiming to be a neutral country while at the same time having British military forces in control of the defences of its most strategically important naval anchorages. His concern was less about the ethical considerations of this than the more practical concerns of the consequences for the Ireland if Britain were to become involved in another European war, and events in Germany were escalating the possibility of this happening. De Valera had great faith in, and hopes for, the League of Nations and was an active participant in its activities, seeing the body as the ultimate defender of the rights of small nations.[34] However, by 1936 the ineffectiveness of the League was becoming exposed and when the League was unable to maintain sanctions against Italy for incursions against Ethiopia it was confirmation for him that small nations could no longer rely on the League for protection against a powerful, determined aggressor. This convinced him that Irish

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[33] James Dillon, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lxii, col. 2674, 18 June 1936.
[34] Michael Kennedy, *Ireland and the League of Nations, 1919-1946* (Dublin, 1996), *passim.*

neutrality had to be both unambiguous and visible. As one historian describes it: 'With the fig leaf of the League so rudely removed, neutrality received more and more emphasis in de Valera's speeches.'[35]

In February 1936, the COS had a complete change of heart about an Irish navy. In a new report, they agreed that they would be willing to consider an Irish navy with destroyers, however reluctantly, because such a force 'would provide a valuable point of contact between that country and the United Kingdom.'[36] Their final recommendation was that a good relationship with the Irish Free State was most desirable and that control of the ports could be released provided that their conditions were met.[37] Malcolm McDonald, in an overview on relations with the Irish Free State, supported the report, especially their statements on the importance of good relations and co-operation on defence.[38]

However, by mid-May 1936, no firm discussions between the two governments had taken place. Joseph Walshe had an informal discussion with Sir Harry Batterbee early in the month at which Batterbee assured him that he had no doubt whatsoever that a transfer would occur once a 'political settlement' had been agreed.[39] The 'political settlement' was not to be confined to matters of defence. It covered partition, constitutional, financial and economic affairs that lay at the heart of the dispute between the two sides.

The CID did not get around to discussing the recommendations made by the COS on 4 February until 12 May 1936. After discussing the options, they agreed with the recommendations, and added their own counsel that 'it would be desirable to offer to hand over complete responsibility for the defences of the reserved ports to the Irish Free State' and they also agreed to the COS suggestion that the Irish Free State be allowed to have destroyers and other naval vessels.[40] This was not a capitulation, though, because their full set of conditions was never going to be accepted by de Valera and the CID must have had some inclination that he would reject them. While they did not

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[35] McMahon, *Republicans and Imperialists*, p. 190.
[36] Deputy COS report 'Coast defences in the Irish Free State' 3 Feb. 1936 (TNA/CAB 24/262).
[37] Appendix to minutes of COS sub-committee meeting, 4 Feb. 1936 (TNA, CAB 24/262).
[38] M.MacDonald, memorandum on relations with Irish Free State, May 1936 (TNA, CAB 24/262).
[39] Walshe to de Valera, 2 May 1936, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, iv, 434.
[40] Minutes of CID meeting, 12 May 1936 (TNA, CAB 2/6); extract from minutes of CID meeting 12 May 1936 (TNA, CAB 27/527).

discuss the political implications of the terms, they would have been aware of the opposition that would be raised in parliament to such a move.

The terms required Ireland to provide an air force for coastal defence that would work in conjunction with the RAF in emergencies; assume full responsibility for modernisation and upkeep of the ports (which de Valera had already offered) and that Britain would review the defences, in co-operation with the Ireland, to ensure that they would be kept up to date.[41] The full set of conditions was never going to be accepted. De Valera's objective was to remove the British presence so no other state could claim doubt about Irish neutrality, and as long as the British army and navy had access to facilities on Irish territory this could never be. He returned to this the following month when he stated 'the occupation of those ports will give to any foreign country that may desire a pretext an opportunity of ignoring our neutrality'.[42]

Malcolm MacDonald certainly did have doubts about the terms offered because he began to consider other options, especially in view of de Valera having announced his policy of revising the Irish constitution in the near future. If he were to remove the king as head of state it could present serious problems for the British government, especially with regard to the Irish Free State position within the Commonwealth, and the consequent effects on imperial defence, and MacDonald wanted to avoid this at all costs. Consequently, he asked for the COS to consider what would happen if the Irish were to be regarded as a foreign, but friendly, power and what options would be open.[43]

The thought of the Irish becoming a foreign power, even a friendly one, did not appeal to the CID. Admiral Chatfield described the seriousness of being denied the use of the reserved ports but he recognised that they could be of no use in war if the Irish were to be hostile to Britain, being impossible to maintain without the co-operation of the Irish people.[44] Sir Edward Harding believed that there was still a possibility that the Irish government might be persuaded to allow Britain to use the ports even if a republic were to be

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[41] Minutes of CID meeting, 12 May 1936 (TNA, CAB 2/6); extract from minutes of CID meeting 12 May 1936 (TNA, CAB 27/527).
[42] Eamon de Valera, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lxii, col. 2659, 18 June 1936,
[43] Minutes of COS sub-committee meeting, 6 July 1936 (TNA, CAB 53/6).
[44] Ibid.

declared. In the end, the COS decided to pass the problem to the Joint Planning Sub-Committee (JPS) for their views. They also indicated that their preferred solution would be some form of offensive/defensive alliance (in which each country would come to the aid of the other in an emergency) and asked the JPS to consider what form this could take.[45]

The three Chiefs of Staff remained extremely concerned at the thought of the Irish Free State becoming a fully independent state, outside the Commonwealth, and they added a final recommendation to their report, at Chatfield's suggestion, that they draft a memorandum highlighting what they described as 'the disastrous effect on our security of an independent Irish Free State, and of the necessity for making every effort to avoid such a contingency arising.'[46] Their fear was understandable. For the first time in over three hundred years a breach was appearing in Britain's western defences—and it was happening when Germany, growing in belligerence, had re-occupied the Rhineland four months earlier.

The JPS took up the matter and confirmed the ongoing need for access to the ports and for air bases. Apart from the traditional need of the ports for defence in the western approaches, they raised the spectre of the ports and air fields falling into enemy hands and Northern Ireland being open to attack.[47] They emphasised that the need for air fields would not be confined just to areas in the vicinity of the ports. With regard to any offensive/defensive alliance that might be agreed they included even more unrealistic conditions that they would never have been accepted by de Valera. These included the free use of all ports by the Royal Navy; the free use of all aerodromes and the liberty to build more; freedom of movement for British troops.[48]

The COS returned to the matter in September 1936 when, in response to a request from Anthony Eden, they drew up a defence paper in preparation for a forthcoming five-power conference, in which they emphasised two items they described as 'the features of greatest importance' in any agreement with the Irish.[49] These were 'the naval ports and anchorages possessed by the Irish

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[45] Ibid.
[46] Minutes of COS sub-committee meeting, 6 July 1936 (TNA, CAB 53/6).
[47] Report by Joint Planning Committee, 23 July 1936 (TNA, CAB 53/28).
[48] Ibid.
[49] Report by the COS sub-committee, Sept. 1936 (TNA, CAB 24/263).

Free State' and 'the existing and potential air bases possessed by the Irish Free State'.[50] They confirmed that they would agree to the ports being returned provided that any new agreement with the Irish ensured free access to the ports and other facilities.[51]

The new conditions that were being imposed were so far removed from political reality that they indicate how little the members of the JPS knew about the Irish political situation. This is a subject that has been well-researched by others[52] and has been referred to elsewhere. From 1923 London had no diplomatic representative in Dublin to provide informed comment on political developments, so it was dependent on information supplied by a variety of alarmists and outsiders.[53] Much of this information was coloured by prejudice and narrow-mindedness and it was not a proper basis for formulating diplomatic policy. De Valera's arrival to office showed up the inadequacy of London's intelligence on Ireland, and for several months he and his party became a preoccupation with Whitehall.[54] At this time, there were increasing numbers of reports of gun-running around the Irish coast, usually unsubstantiated, and the ensuing widespread press coverage in Britain raised public concern about safety, while British naval response to them caused more friction between the governments. Incidents like these exposed a serious lack of security and intelligence co-operation at the time.[55] This inadequacy of political intelligence continued throughout the 1930s and it contributed to an unwarranted belief in London that an Irish government would, in a time of crisis, finally co-operate in Britain's military needs.[56] One analysis of this unfounded optimism describes it as being based 'on an unwillingness to accept that the state was effectively independent, that it had fled the nests of union and empire, never to return.'[57] It also asserted that this lack of intelligence allowed de Valera to play up the danger from the IRA in his discussions with the British government and to exploit latent fears in London

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[50] Ibid.
[51] Report by the COS sub-committee, Sept. 1936 (TNA, CAB 24/263).
[52] O'Halpin, *Defending Ireland; Spying on Ireland*; McMahon, *British Spies and Irish rebels.*
[53] O'Halpin, *Defending Ireland,* p. 20.
[54] Ibid
[55] Ibid. p. 108.
[56] McMahon, *British spies and Irish rebels*, p. 251.
[57] Ibid.

over the instability of the Irish Free State because of the threat from militant republicanism.[58]

Nevertheless, in 1936 there continued to be universal agreement in British military, naval, and political circles that the defended ports would not be of much use unless friendly relations existed with Ireland and there was agreement on their use. When de Valera announced that he intended revising the constitution and removing the king as head of state he added to the defence concerns that existed in London about the Irish being outside the empire.[59] De Valera was still regarded unfavourably in Whitehall and not one who could be persuaded to change his opinion. However, they could do little more than hope that he would co-operate. Two years later, at another meeting of the COS, Sir Thomas Inskip, the Attorney General, believed that even though de Valera would still give no guarantee on defence co-operation 'there was little question that he would be prepared to place the harbours of Éire at our disposal in time of war.'[60] Such a conclusion owed nothing to hard intelligence and everything to unjustifiable optimism. Nonetheless, de Valera did make inferences on a number of occasions subsequently—always informally—that it might be possible to open up the ports to Britain.

Malcolm MacDonald probably had a greater appreciation of de Valera's mind than any of his colleagues and he, also, retained a hope that de Valera could be persuaded to co-operate on defence. His judgment was partly based on a statement made by John Dulanty, the High Commissioner, and authorised by de Valera:

> If we are to take the measures which are clearly necessary to prevent our country becoming a point of attack on England we must be informed unreservedly of your plans. Consultation between the defence experts of your country and ours appear to be not only desirable, but, from the point of view of common sense, indispensable.[61]

Unfortunately for MacDonald, de Valera's idea of co-operation on defence did not extend to allowing British military forces having free access to Irish facilities, but he did give MacDonald some cause for hope following two

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[58] Ibid., p. 247.
[59] Minutes of COS meeting 6 July 1936 (TNA, CAB 53/6); COS report on Irish Free State relations, Aug. 1936 (TNA, CAB 53/28).
[60] Inskip, minutes of COS meeting 19 Jan. 1938 (TNA/CAB 53/9).
[61] MacDonald memorandum 'Relations with the Irish Free State', May 1936 (TNA, CAB 24/262).

meetings with him in January 1937 at which they had discussions on all aspects of the relationship. At the meeting, de Valera refused to give any guarantee that Britain could use Irish ports, and he informed MacDonald that co-operation on defence would be impossible if Britain were to insist on it.[62] He also added an extraordinary comment that was out of character with anything else he had said on the ports. According to MacDonald, de Valera 'replied that he personally thought that if we were involved in war we should get the use of the ports.'[63] This was the first time that de Valera had indicated, albeit informally, that there could be a possibility of British forces having access to facilities in Ireland. How de Valera was able to square this comment with his other arguments about Irish neutrality being compromised is not known. In his report following his second meeting with de Valera three days later, he reported that de Valera returned to the topic, repeating that while it was politically impossible for him at the time to promise the use of the ports in time of war, he hinted that if partition came to an end he might consider it. He also asked MacDonald for the British government to base their plans:

> on alternative hypotheses according as the ports were or were not available for our use. In the case where the ports were to be available his experts should consult with ours in drawing up the plan so that cooperation could take place without delay if the event should arise.[64]

The fact that de Valera raised such a possibility twice in three days indicates that the idea was not just a fleeting thought. However, if he did consider that such an eventuality was worth exploring at the time, he must have cast it from his mind later because he did not raise the matter again.

MacDonald had another two informal meetings with de Valera in October 1937 while they were both in Geneva. MacDonald reiterated the British offer to relinquish the ports in return for a guarantee of their use in war. De Valera was adamant that it would be politically impossible for him to give that guarantee, and that the Irish regarded British occupation of the ports as 'an infringement of their sovereignty.'[65] In those circumstances, de Valera insisted, if Britain remained in the ports and became involved in war

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[62] MacDonald memorandum 'Relations with the Irish Free State', 16 Jan. 1937 (TNA, CAB 24/267).
[63] Ibid.
[64] Minutes of cabinet meeting, 19 Jan. 1938 (TNA, CAB 23/92).
[65] MacDonald, memorandum 'Relations with the Irish Free State', 6 Oct. 1937 (TNA, CAB 24/271).

he was fearful that there would be land attacks on the forts by 'irresponsible but considerable Irish forces' and the thought of conflict between Ireland and Britain once again would arouse widespread hostility among the Irish population.[66] There was no direct reference to de Valera's earlier personal comment about the possibility of access to the ports being granted but it was referred to indirectly, but this time with a qualification. According to MacDonald, de Valera stated that if Britain were to vacate the ports 'there was much more likelihood then that if war came the Irish would come in on our side, and much more likelihood of being invited to use the ports in the common defence of our two countries'[67]. Perhaps de Valera realised that his earlier, informal comment to MacDonald could have undermined his position. He back-tracked further during the final negotiations leading to the agreement between the two governments. At a conference in London on 23 February 1938 Inskip asked de Valera if he would now allow it to be stated publicly that 'he said that he would take certain steps regarding defence.'[68] De Valera replied that Inskip's question had put him in a difficult position and that he had done no more than try to give an indication of where he felt the interests of the Irish people lay. He said there was 'no question of there being an understanding just because he had told UK ministers what he felt would have been in the best interest of the Irish. He concluded that Britain should hand over the ports on their own responsibility and not 'on the basis of trust in him'.[69] If Arthur Griffith had been able to obfuscate so well when Lloyd George confounded him by producing the evidence of their private agreement there might have been a different outcome to the 1921 negotiations.

The fact of the matter is that de Valera knew that he held a winning hand in the negotiations on the ports, and he intended playing it. With war looming, Britain could not afford to take the risk of being obliged to remain in the ports among a hostile population.

MacDonald may not have paid too much attention to de Valera's informal comments because in a memorandum he wrote in June 1937 he

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[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Minutes of conference between representatives of UK and Éire, 23 Feb. 1938, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, v, 234.
[69] Ibid.

referred to a communication with John Dulanty the previous month in which Dulanty expressed the view that while it would be 'politically inexpedient' for de Valera to give any assurances on the use of the ports, he believed that 'it would be possible to discover a formula about our using the ports...which he hoped would be satisfactory to us.'[70] MacDonald's opinion of Dulanty was that 'he was not always a reliable guide to his master's mind' and, having had the benefit of two extended meetings with de Valera, MacDonald's conclusion was 'I cannot share his optimism.'[71]

De Valera had begun work on drafting a new constitution during 1935 and the British government was aware of the type of changes that were likely to be included. Their main concerns revolved around the position of the king in the new constitution and whether any change would result in the Irish Free State leaving the Commonwealth, or being obliged to leave it. It would have been an embarrassment and a blow to national pride if the king were no longer to be recognised as head of state and if the Irish Free State were to leave the Commonwealth, but on a more practical level, it would have had serious consequences for Britain's defences if the Irish were to sever all ties.

After his meeting with de Valera in January 1937 MacDonald got a fuller understanding of what de Valera had in mind for the new constitution. The first points he made to the cabinet were that de Valera had made it clear to him that the Irish Free State would remain in the Commonwealth and that the king would remain in the new constitution as 'king of Ireland and the symbol of the Commonwealth' although he, or his representative, would have no function in the internal affairs of the state.[72]

MacDonald was not happy about the changes, especially about ambiguity in the wording, but there is a sense of relief in his report that it could have been worse for Britain. With regard to defence, his advice to the cabinet was that it would be better to go along with de Valera's plans because there would be a greater chance of co-operation with him on a defence policy.[73]

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[70] MacDonald, memorandum 'Relations with the Irish Free State' , 4 June 1937 (TNA, CAB 27/273).
[71] Ibid.
[72] MacDonald, memorandum 'Relations with the Irish Free State', 18 Jan. 1937 (TNA, CAB 24/267).
[73] Ibid.

At the cabinet meeting that discussed the report on 25 January 1937 there was a consensus that MacDonald's advice be adopted, although there were objections from the Secretary of State for India, Lord Zetland, because of concern over the possible effect of the legislation on nationalist sentiment in India.[74] The Lord Privy Seal, Lord Halifax, was positive to the extent of stating 'the remarkable thing was that Mr de Valera had been able to persuade his supporters to go so far in accepting the Crown as they had done.'[75]

By not declaring a republic, by staying in the Commonwealth, and by retaining the link with the crown, however tenuous, de Valera provided the cabinet with the means of accepting the inevitable without too much loss of face. He also ensured that friendly relations could continue and allow him to be in a stronger position to gain British co-operation in matters of defence and military supplies if war broke out.

The cabinet advised the other dominions of developments, and in a document that could be described as upbeat in some respects, emphasised how the king remained in the constitution and would 'continue to perform functions regarding the Irish Free State's external affairs.'[76] Replies from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa were all supportive of de Valera's actions and the British government's response to them, and agreed that the constitutional changes would not bring about any change to the 'Free State's position in the Commonwealth'.[77]

MacDonald continued to draw comfort from the king remaining in the constitution and in June 1937 he drew the cabinet's attention to another clause that he felt was important: 'war shall not be declared and Éire shall not participate in any war save with the assent of Dáil Éireann'. MacDonald's interpretation of this was that as it was not stated that the president shall declare war, and on the basis of his last conversation with de Valera, de Valera had accepted that it was for the king to declare war (but with the assent of the Dáil) on behalf of Éire.[78]

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[74] Minutes of cabinet meeting, 25 Jan. 1937 (TNA, CAB 23/87).
[75] Ibid.
[76] Telegram sent to dominions, 2 Feb. 1937 (TNA, CAB 24/268).
[77] Telegrams from dominions, Feb. and Mar. 1937 (TNA 24/268); Annex 1, ISC memorandum on relations with the IFS, 7 May 1937 (TNA, CAB 24/273).
[78] MacDonald, ISC memorandum to cabinet, 4 June 1937 (TNA, CAB 24/273).

However much the members of the cabinet may have deplored the further loosening of influence over Éire they knew there was little they could do, either individually or collectively, to change the course of events. The best they could do was to put a brave face on things and to accept the inevitable gracefully, notwithstanding de Valera's intransigence over the ports. The new constitution was put to the Irish people in July 1937 and was passed by a margin of fifty six per cent of the votes to forty four per cent, and came into law in December.[79]

At a meeting with de Valera in Geneva in October 1937, MacDonald again said that Britain was ready to cease occupation of the ports if de Valera would give Britain an assurance on access to them. De Valera once more refused to give any such assurance, but repeated that if Éire were enjoined in a war along with Britain there would be no difficulty in allowing access.[80] De Valera also told MacDonald that he was aware that he had 'made practically no provision for the Irish Free State defending herself' in a war,[81] so his offer to MacDonald could not be described as selfless.

De Valera also indicated that he was willing to lay out whatever expenditure was needed to modernise the ports and the defences of the whole Irish coastline; to increase considerably the size of the Irish army; to purchase some ships - in effect, to establish the nucleus of a navy; to purchase some airplanes and also, in effect, to establish the nucleus of an air force.[82] He offered this as part of the concessions he was willing to make in return for an overall agreement on the land annuities, partition, and other outstanding matters. MacDonald impressed on de Valera that the British government could not make a decision to vacate the ports if their military advisors said that they were essential to Britain's defence, and that their advice would be the determining factor in any such decision. De Valera challenged the need to adhere to the advice of military advisors, saying that they were 'notoriously conservative and limited in outlook' and that they were 'always thinking in terms of the past war', leaving MacDonald to reflect on how British ministers were obliged to rely on military advice while de Valera, clearly, did not,

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[79] S. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford companion to Irish history* (2nd ed., Oxford, 2002).
[80] MacDonald, memorandum 'Relations with the Irish Free State', 6 Oct. 1937 (TNA, CAB 24/271).
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.

although he did agree with de Valera that the ministers would have the final say in any decision.[83] Despite his endeavours the only definite assurance with which MacDonald left the meeting was that de Valera would 'take all necessary measures to deny the use of Irish Free State territory to the enemy of this country, and that if his own forces are inadequate for this purpose he will invite the assistance of ours.'[84]

With conditions in Europe continuing to deteriorate, MacDonald wrote a memorandum reviewing defence matters in the light of his discussion with de Valera. He now accepted that de Valera would not make any facilities available in the event of war and that the plans that had been agreed with the COS, and approved by the CID in May 1936, were no longer valid. [85] MacDonald knew that without the accord of the COS on defence matters there would be no hope of parliament giving their assent to any defence agreement with Éire especially one that proposed returning the ports. Accordingly, he wrote a memorandum for the ISC in which he proposed that the COS be asked to review western coastal defences in the light of his discussions with de Valera and to advise if, from a military point of view, the retention of their existing rights over the ports was so important that it outweighed the advantages to be gained from a defence alliance along the lines discussed with de Valera.[86] He also recommended that if the COS answer was in the affirmative, then they would recommend a settlement favourable to Éire on the outstanding financial matters. In other words, the COS was to be encouraged to alter their military advice to ease a political decision. MacDonald did acknowledge that his recommendation would not make for the best solution but in view of de Valera's intransigence he believed it to be the best achievable.[87]

MacDonald's memorandum indicates that he was now convinced that there was no prospect of being able to retain the ports if Ireland was to remain on friendly terms in the event of war. He saw the need to secure agreement on all outstanding matters, and by conceding the ports he felt that

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[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] MacDonald, ISC memorandum 10 Dec. 1937 (TNA, CAB 24/273).
[86] Ibid.
[87] MacDonald, report on discussions with de Valera, 6 Oct. 1937 (TNA, CAB 24/271).

it would be possible to secure agreement on the financial, trade, and partition problems that remained. He reminded the committee how de Valera never failed to raise the question of partition as being a major stumbling block to full, good relations between the two countries, and that he never accepted the British stance that the solution to it lay with the people of the two parts of the island.[88] MacDonald never ceased to recognise the importance of maintaining friendly relations with Ireland, and he expressed his pragmatic attitude to Irish neutrality in a letter to Sir Eric Machtig, acting under-secretary in the Dominions Office after ear had broken out:

> But on the practical side a neutral Éire means a peaceful and not a distracted Éire. It means an Éire which can work in the field of our essential supplies with a curious immunity from hostile intervention, which supplies us with a certain flow of recruits and which, on the whole, preserves *'une neutralié dirigée et bienveillante à notre égard.'*[89]

The ISC discussed MacDonald's memorandum on 15 December. They accepted the principle behind MacDonald's proposal but they disagreed with some of the wording because they felt it 'might be construed as an invitation to the COS to form an estimate of the political as well as the military aspects of the policy.'[90] Therefore, they revised the general question under which the COS were to be asked to consider the ports. They were to be asked to give an estimate of the military significance of the reserved ports to Britain during a major war in situations where Éire would be friendly or hostile, and where the ports would be in British or Irish hands.[91]

Among their final recommendations, 'subject to further consideration in the light of Report from the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee' were that Britain should withdraw from the ports, provided that a defence agreement was secured with Éire under which the state would modernise the ports and upgrade all coastal defences in accordance with the advice of British military advisors; increase considerably the numbers in the defence forces, and co-operate with Britain on defence matters.[92] In return, the British government

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[88] MacDonald, ISC memorandum 10 Dec. 1937 (TNA, CAB 24/273).
[89] MacDonald to Machtig, 16 Jan. 1940 (TNA, DO 35/1107/11).
[90] Minutes of ISC meeting, 15 Dec. 1937 (TNA/CAB 24/273).
[91] Ibid
[92] Ibid.

would offer a settlement of all outstanding political differences, including the abandonment of the land annuity payments.

De Valera had already indicated to MacDonald that he was willing to increase the size of the army, upgrade the defences of the ports, provide some planes and ships, but he was adamant that he would give no assurance that the ports would be available to British forces in time of war.[93] Nonetheless, the ISC now proposed, for the first time, to remove specific requirements about the ports being available, and to replace them with the requirement that Éire 'co-operate closely with us on defence matters, maintaining contact with us in the development of their defence plans, and inviting the advice of our experts in the organization of their defence forces and equipment.'[94] These conditions represented a significant change in outlook because they did not contain specific demands that could have undermined the previous reason for refusing to co-operate on military matters: the declared neutrality of Éire.

The COS sub-committee discussed the scenarios as requested by the ISC. Lord Chatfield, the First Sea Lord, emphasised how Britain's defences would be greatly handicapped without the ports as the alternatives had serious disadvantages.[95] They did not actually discuss the matters as separate items. For them, any scenario that envisaged a hostile Ireland was to be avoided, to the extent of saying that it was their 'duty ... to point out the vital necessity of preventing so serious a contingency from arising.'[96] The main reason for not wanting to face a hostile Ireland was most clearly explained by Lord Gort, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. He estimated that, in war, at least one division (comprising between 10,000 and 15,000 men) would be required to defend each port, and if it was decided to re-take them by force, the military commitment would be much more serious, and he concluded by stating that a situation in which Ireland would be hostile 'must never be allowed to happen'.[97] Gort concluded by stating that if a decision were to be taken to re-occupy the ports by force, it would be necessary for operations to be contemplated that would be 'comparable to the Gallipoli landing'. Gort's

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[93] MacDonald memorandum to cabinet, 6 Oct. 1937 (TNA, CAB 24/271).
[94] Minutes of ISC meeting, 15 Dec. 1937 (TNA/CAB 24/273).
[95] Minutes of COS sub-committee meeting, 22 Dec. 1937 (TNA, CAB 53/8).
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.

figures were confirmed in the subsequent COS report, with an additional comment that to try to take the ports in the face of a hostile Ireland 'would at best involve a most formidable commitment and might, even so, be impossible.'[98] Even if Britain could have spared the manpower and equipment to undertake such an operation (which it could not) the spectre of another Gallipoli would have been enough to rule it out as an option.

The number of divisions required to re-take the ports were exclusive of another 1075 artillery specialists and engineers that would be needed for the upgraded defences.[99] In addition, twenty four trawlers, each costing £6000 to convert to minesweepers would have to be provided, as well as two squadrons of flying boats at Bantry Bay.[100] These were costs that the British government could not afford because of other commitments, including commitments towards all other defended ports in Britain which were not in any better state of repair than those in Ireland.

In their final report, the COS restated their previously expressed views that the three ports would be needed in a war for anti-submarine patrols and for convoy escorts and that Berehaven would be needed as a base for the Channel fleet. For the other scenarios, they confirmed that a situation in which Ireland would be hostile was to be avoided at all costs, and that no effort should be spared to ensure that friendly relations with Ireland were maintained.[101] They also re-stated previously held opinions that in a war with Germany the non-availability of the ports would seriously hamper naval operations but they could not be claimed to be 'absolutely vital', but that in a war with France 'the availability of ports in Ireland in these circumstances is of the highest importance'.[102]

What is notable about all expressed views of the Admiralty or the COS, over the years, of the relative importance of the ports in a war against France or Germany is that none seems to have countenanced a situation in which Germany would take control of France and its northern and western coasts. Consequently, the relative importance of the ports should not have been

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[98] COS sub-committee report on defended ports, 12 Jan. 1938 (TNA, CAB 104/22); (TNA, CAB 27/527).
[99] CID memorandum on the defended ports, 21 Jan. 1938 (TNA, CAB 104/21).
[100] Ibid.
[101] COS sub-committee report on defended ports, 12 Jan. 1938 (TNA, CAB 104/22); (TNA, CAB 27/527)
[102] Ibid.

determined only by which of the two countries against whom Britain would have been at war, but which country controlled the coastline of northern and western France. So, for the COS to state in January 1938 that the ports were of less importance in the event of a war against Germany and of the highest importance in a war against France meant that the ports would have remained 'of the highest importance' once Germany overran France and established naval bases along the coastline.

Representatives of both governments met on a number of occasions during January and February 1938 to discuss agreements on defence, finance and trade. The main representatives on the Irish side were de Valera, who took the lead in all discussions, Sean MacEntee and Sean Lemass while the main British personnel were Chamberlain, assisted by MacDonald, Inskip, along with Sir Samuel Hoare and Sir John Simon.

The first meeting was held on 17 January and opened with the matter that was of prime importance to both sides – defence and the Treaty Ports. De Valera made his position clear from the outset by stating that 'the claim of Éire to the Defended Ports rested primarily on the doctrine of National Sovereignty' and that the presence of British troops in the ports was considered by the Irish people to be 'an act of aggression'. He followed up by insisting that in the event of an outbreak of war 'he would advise the United Kingdom government to lay their plans on the basis that the Irish Defended Ports would not be available to them.'[103] He took the edge off this by also stating that 'they should provide, however, for the possibility of switching over to the use of the Irish Ports at a later stage.'[104] He also declared in his opening statement that 'if the United Kingdom delegates had met him in a more satisfactory way over the Partition issue, he would have been able to go further.'[105]

Later, when Chamberlain questioned him specifically on whether he would have responded differently to British defence needs if the United Kingdom 'had met him over partition'. De Valera replied 'that this would have

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[103] Minutes of conference between representatives of the United Kingdom and Ireland, 17 Jan. 1938, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy, v*, 151.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.

been so. The hatchet would have been buried, and things would have been fundamentally different.'[106]

De Valera used partition as his reason for not co-operating on defence at subsequent meetings of the delegates. At the second meeting he repeated that if there had been any progress over partition the defence situation 'could have been explained to the people of Ireland in a much more convincing way.'[107] He repeated again at the sixth meeting that there could be no defence agreement as long as partition remained.[108]

A draft outline of agreement on the ports was drawn up at a meeting on 19 January which would have seen the ports returned to the Irish government and with Britain continuing to provide manpower and supplies until the Irish government was in a position to take over complete responsibility.[109]

MacDonald's view of the meeting was that de Valera was favourably disposed towards a mutual defence agreement, mainly because, he claimed, any threat by Germany to Britain was also a threat to Éire.[110] However, de Valera had again made it clear that any agreement that was arrived at could not include the use of the ports by Britain, and plans should be drawn up on that basis, although MacDonald's report stated that he 'had hinted that if partition came to an end he might be able to consider it.'[111]

It is difficult to see how any agreement on partition could have been finalised within the time available that would have been acceptable to all, not least to Craig and the Northern Irish Unionists. For de Valera to have agreed to any arrangement that would have included a joint defence agreement with Britain, retention of the ports by Britain, increased facilities for aircraft, and increased numbers of British military personnel in Ireland would not have solved the fundamental problem. Irish sovereignty and Éire's declared status as a neutral country would have continued to be compromised and would

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[106] Ibid.
[107] Minutes of conference between representatives of the United Kingdom and Ireland, 18 Jan. 1938, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy,* v, 166.
[108] Minutes of conference between representatives of the United Kingdom and Ireland, 23 Feb. 1938, in*Documents on Irish foreign policy,* v, 226.
[109] Draft outline for defence agreement revised after conference meeting, 19 Jan. 1938, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, v, 197.
[110] Minutes of cabinet meeting, 26 Jan. 1938 (TNA, CAB 23/92);
[111] Ibid.

have resulted in the country being dragged into the subsequent World War against the will of most people in Ireland.

De Valera's attitude changed, though, when he returned home and discussed the idea with the government. His preferred solution now was for the Éire government to take over the ports without entering into any defence agreement. He recognised 'that the security of Éire ultimately depended on the Royal Navy keeping the command of the sea ... [and] that if the United Kingdom lost the command of the sea, Éire would be unable to effectively defend herself against a strong aggressor.'[112] Despite the efforts of the frustrated British representatives he refused to budge from this position and his claim that partition was at the root of all problems between them.

De Valera also made it clear that any agreement on defence, either formal or informal, was politically impossible for him to enter into and nothing that was said by Irish representatives was to be taken as consideration in return of the ports. In other words, he now wanted the ports back without conceding anything on defence, finance or trade. When pressed by Chamberlain, he admitted that 'the security of Éire ultimately depended on the Royal Navy and that if the United Kingdom lost command of the sea, Éire would be unable to effectively defend herself against a strong aggressor.'[113] Despite this irrationality, de Valera persisted, arguing that any evident form of agreement on defence would meet with strong resistance at home.

At a meeting on 1 March the ISC had a final discussion on a course of action on handing back the ports but they were unable to agree on a policy that they could recommend to the cabinet.[114] The only agreement they came to was that they were more trouble than they were worth. The Home Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, regarded them as a liability rather than an asset. Chamberlain believed that in the political circumstances, they provided Britain with no safeguard, and that they were of no use. Inskip, in his new position as Minister for the Co-Ordination for Defence, said that the ports' defences were obsolete, as were most of the defended ports in Britain. The difficulty they faced was that de Valera refused to give anything in return, and

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[112] Secretary's notes of conference between representatives of the United Kingdom and Éire, 23 Feb. 1938, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, v, 230.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Minutes of ISC meeting, 1 Mar. 1938 (TNA, CAB 27/524).

there would be difficulty over this in parliament. They passed the problem back to the cabinet with a statement that it was for cabinet to decide whether the ports should be handed back in the absence of a defence agreement.[115]

The cabinet also accepted that they had no answer to de Valera's intransigence, and at a meeting in London the following day took the decision to hand over the ports without any conditions.[116] Chamberlain reiterated the view that the goodwill of the Irish people would be vital for the foreseeable future and that, in any event, the ports now had a low priority in government plans.

Having succeeded in his objective, de Valera made a point of refusing to allow the British representatives to seek concessions on the other outstanding matters. At the next conference of ministers on 3 March he complained about the costs of modernising the port defences and that 'it was not at all certain that the people of Éire would welcome the gift. They would probably take the view that they did not want the ports if it meant undertaking a heavy financial burden.'[117] He now disputed War Office figures that he had been given of £1.4 million in capital expenditure and annual maintenance costs of £0.5 million. Chamberlain was taken aback by this stance, exclaiming that 'he was lost in admiration of Mr de Valera's skill in dialectics' and asked him if he 'was trying to make it appear that we were thrusting a burden on Éire in making her take over the ports.'[118] De Valera's ungraciousness in victory by moaning about the costs and by continuing to link partition to the unqualified offer of the ports exasperated Chamberlain so much that he suggested a solution: that the 'UK ministers might decide to spare Mr de Valera the embarrassment of having the treaty ports offered to him.'[119]

Chamberlain and his cabinet continued to feel sore over having to relinquish control over the ports without getting anything in return. At their final cabinet meeting before presenting the final agreement to parliament he admitted that this was unfortunate but that they were obliged to face reality, and that the alternative in the event of war would have been to try and enforce

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[115] Minutes of ISC meeting, 1 Mar. 1938 (TNA, CAB 27/524).
[116] Minutes of cabinet meeting, 2 Mar. 1938 (TNA, CAB 23/92).
[117] Minutes of conference between representatives of UK and Éire, 3 Mar. 1938, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, v, 224.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.

their rights—an alternative that was fraught with problems.[120] Chamberlain did take some cheer from the speech made by de Valera in the Dáil after the agreement.[121] In his speech, de Valera said that 'it is far better for Britain, far more advantageous for Britain, to have a free Ireland by its side than an Ireland that would be unfriendly' and he repeated his assertion that Ireland would never allow its territory be used as a base for attack on Britain.[122] Throughout, Chamberlain had accepted that the ports would have to be returned without conditions but it is likely that he would have expected even a little appreciation from de Valera. Britain could not afford the money to modernise the ports and if they insisted on conditions they would risk alienating any goodwill that would be generated by a magnanimous gesture.[123]

Discussions between the two governments concluded on 22 April and the agreement was formally signed three days later. Under the terms of the agreement, the provisions of Articles 6 and 7 were abolished and the British government would transfer the harbour defences and ancillary property to the Irish government.[124] Agreement on the value of property (including regimental property) taken over by the Irish government was not finalised until 31 March 1939 when the Irish government paid £18,966.19s. 4*d* to the War Office in respect of army stores and equipment relating to Berehaven and Lough Swilly that had been handed over.[125]

On the two other matters, the government of Ireland was to pay the British government £10,000,000 as a final settlement of all financial claims of either government against the other, and customs duties on exports and imports between the two countries were to be removed. The agreement was approved in the Dáil and at Westminster. Churchill staunchly denounced the agreement in a speech that exposed his lack of appreciation of the political reality that faced the cabinet.[126] Churchill still felt a personal ownership of Articles 6 and 7 of the 1921 treaty and he was unable to accept that

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[120] Minutes of cabinet meeting, 25 Apr. 1938 (TNA, CAB 23/93).
[121] *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, cccxxxv, cols 1076-77, 5 May 1938.
[122] De Valera, *Dáil Éireann deb.*, cxxi., c. 36, 27 Apr. 1938.
[123] Minutes of ISC meeting 1 Mar. 1938 (TNA, CAB 27/524).
[124] Agreements between the governments of the UK and Ireland, 25 Apr. 1938, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, v, 278-79.
[125] Irish High Commissioner's office to Dominions Office, 28 and 31 Mar. 1931 (TNA, DO 35/528/1).
[126] *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, cccxxxv, cols 1094-1104, 5 May 1938 vol. 335.

circumstances had changed significantly in the intervening years. He opposed almost every aspect of the new agreement in the strongest terms.

Furthermore, Lord Chatfield, the First Sea Lord, was not at all happy about how the views of the COS on defence may have been represented, and three days after the agreement had been signed he wrote to Sir Maurice Hankey, the Cabinet Secretary. He reminded him of the COS report of 12 January 1938[127] in which they had stated that in a war against Germany the ports were not absolutely vital, although their loss would seriously hamper naval operations.[128]

More importantly, he also reminded Hankey that their recommendation was based on the understanding that the Irish government would agree to a joint defence pact with Britain – and this condition was not included in the final agreement.[129] He also warned Hankey of how difficult it might be for the government, during the debate on the treaty, if questions were asked about the Admiralty and the CID being satisfied with the defence terms, adding that he had it on good authority that such a challenge was to be made by Winston Churchill.[130]

Hankey took note of Chatfield's comments and made some amendments for use by Chamberlain during the debate. Chatfield, however, was still not satisfied that Hankey's amendments represented the views of the COS, and he wrote another memorandum to him the following day. He insisted that their complete views, as expressed in their reports, be made clear because there was an implication in Hankey's draft that 'we are completely satisfied with the Agreement from the defence point of view, which of course we are not.'[131]

Chamberlain had shown great determination in his efforts to reach agreement with de Valera and to resolve the impasse before war broke out. There is a view that he had good reasons for doing so.[132] It allowed him to be free to concentrate on the wider events that were unfolding, and it would also have been difficult for him, both personally and politically, to have gone so far

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[127] COS sub-committee report on defended ports in Ireland, 12 Jan. 1938 (TNA, CAB 27/527).
[128] Chatfield to Hankey, 28 Apr. 1938. (TNA, CAB 104/22).
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Chatfield to Hankey, 29 Apr. 1938. (TNA, CAB 104/22).
[132] Canning, *British policy towards Ireland, 1921-41*, p. 210.

in the negotiations without succeeding. It is also argued that he never fully appreciated the value of the ports to the Royal Navy in time of war, and that he never grasped how important the ports were in 1917 when Britain came so close to defeat by submarines.[133] This may be so but it should not detract from his recognition of the need to strengthen Britain's western defences by ensuring that Éire remained on friendly terms and that its declared neutrality might even, as subsequently happened, develop a more disposed bias.[134] He was proved to be right to believe that the potential benefits that would likely arise from an amicable settlement would offset the lack of goodwill that would have been a consequence of retaining the ports.

Chamberlain has been depicted as a weak-minded prime minister because of his policy of appeasement and the peace agreement with Hitler at Munich. Similarly, his agreement to return the Treaty Ports was strongly criticised as being yet another capitulation at a critical time in European history. In fact, both decisions were supported by sound logic.

In September 1938, Britain was in no position to engage in a war with Germany and Chamberlain knew it. Only the previous month, Sir Thomas Inskip, the Minister for Co-Ordination of Defence, had advised the cabinet that Britain would not be ready for a war for 'another year or more'.[135] Reductions in defence spending over many years had left the three armed services ill-equipped to take on the German military machine. Chamberlain's 'appeasement' of Hitler bought another twelve months during which the country's armed services could be brought up to a more acceptable level. The agreement with Ireland had the more long-term objective of helping to secure the western defences. A decision not to have returned the ports would have consequences for Britain that would have negated any advantages.

While Britain's inter-services rivalries and reduced expenditure on defence in the inter-war years resulted in the country being under-prepared for war in 1938 it can be said that there were always plans in place to deal with any emergency, unlike Ireland. Even as late as early January 1938 no overall strategic defence plan had been adopted in Ireland to deal with air

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[133] Canning, 'Yet another failure for appeasment'in *The International History Review,* p. 383.
[134] Kennedy, *Guarding neutral Ireland,* passim. Kennedy's book gives a detailed account of the co-operation that took place between the two countries.
[135] Inskip, minutes of cabinet meeting, 30 Aug. 1938 (TNA, CAB 23/94).

attack or invasion, nor had a plan even been written by the Department of Defence. Clearly, air and sea defence would be provided by British forces.

However, in 1936 Colonel Dan Bryan, then Assistant Director of G2, wrote a comprehensive analysis of the situation that faced Ireland in the event of a European war. No formal action was ever taken in response to it and it was left lying in the Department of Defence.

In his plan, Bryan restated the geopolitical importance of Ireland's location not just to Britain but to any naval or air power engaged in a European war.[136] He drew attention to how Ireland's military resources would never be capable of effectively defending the country and that it would, like all small states, have to enter into an alliance with other countries.[137] He also stressed the importance of the Treaty Ports to Britain in a war: 'the free use of these and other Irish harbours for British naval purposes would be absolutely essential in case of war with a great power'[138] and how in such a war 'it might be necessary to base the main British fleet in Irish harbours.'[139]

Bryan drew attention to these facts because he was so concerned about Ireland being unable to defend itself if Britain decided to invade the country to get access to facilities. He had no illusions about Ireland being able to hold off a British invasion indefinitely but he did expect that 'a degree of resistance as would seriously embarrass them in the prosecution of their general war policy' and ensure that Britain would be in the situation so greatly feared by generals and politicians alike – among 'a bitterly hostile people instead of friendly allies.'[140]

Moreover, what exercised Bryan's mind even more was how open to invasion Ireland was by another European power at war with Britain. Ireland was in a position to control access to Britain by sea, so a major European naval power in control of Ireland could shut off Britain's supply line. It could also provide a base from which to launch air attacks on Britain.

The paper received little attention and the country faced the prospect of being in the front line of a war without either plan or equipment to defend

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[136] Dan Bryan papers , memorandum, 'Fundamental factors affecting Saorstát defence problem, May 1936, (UCD Archives, P71/8).
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.

itself. There are indications that the analysis did get some attention in 1938 when de Valera agreed that the army reserves be called up, equipment be purchased and a national coast watching service be created (this being a priority that Bryan had emphasised).[141]

The coast watching service proved to be an extremely efficient and relatively inexpensive body that accumulated valuable information on over-flying aircraft, submarines, shipping during the course of the war but the Department of Finance had tried to scotch even this, judging it to be too hasty and 'a futile waste of effort.[142] As Bryan had observed: 'the Saorstát public, and even public officials, public representatives etc. are largely ignorant of the problems raised in this paper.'[143]

Britain was very conscious of these possibilities and it was largely because of them that Chamberlain was so anxious to come to agreement with de Valera. The agreement that was finally reached ensured that Britain had a friendly neighbour between itself and the north-eastern Atlantic that was expected to be the centre of any future war with Germany.

De Valera's rise to power, coinciding with the growth in National Socialism in Germany, changed everything. Britain realised very quickly that de Valera's objectives with the treaty were quite different to his predecessor's, and recognised how fragile their defences actually were in the north-western Atlantic. The changing situation in Europe exposed the anomaly in Ireland's claim to be a neutral country while having British forces on its territory, providing its naval defences. The threat of war was enough reason for de Valera to move to eliminate the defence clauses of the treaty, but his own nationalism and the heightened nationalism of the country ensured that ideology gave an even stronger impetus to his attempt to seek the complete dismantling of the treaty.

De Valera's nationalist programme upset the complacency that existed for the first ten years of independence. The British government was happy with the working arrangement with the Irish government, and treated the Irish Free State as a dominion, satisfied that the defensive arrangements agreed

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[141] Kennedy, *Guarding neutral Ireland*, p. 17.
[142] Ibid. p. 18.
[143] Bryan, 'Fundamental factors', (UCD, P71/8)

under the treaty would be honoured. The Irish government had too many other, more immediate, problems to contend with in governing a new independent state to be overly concerned about the country's defences in another European war. Such a situation was not envisaged in the 1920s, so soon after 'the war to end all wars'.

The new agreement with Britain in 1938 ensured that the country's neutrality could not be challenged, and while it was not wholly satisfactory for Britain, it did ensure that Britain had a friendly ally on its vulnerable western approaches. Ireland was now free of any defence obligations to Britain and was entirely responsible for its own defence. It was now possible to demonstrate its commitment to being a neutral state without the encumbrance of having the British army in control of its major coastal defences, and with a new European war in the offing, this was a development of great significance.

11. Facing a World War once again

The crisis in Europe came to a head on 1 September 1939 when Germany invaded Poland, followed two days later when Britain and France declared that a state of war existed with Germany.

Britain needed facilities on Éire's western seaboard to adequately mount a defence against a U-boat threat or an invasion of Britain or Éire and in response to Britain's attempts to gain defence concessions, de Valera made it clear to Chamberlain and his colleagues that they would not be granted. The country's neutrality was to be visibly upheld and Éire would play no part in the war. Only if the country were were to be attacked would British forces be allowed into the country to defend it from an enemy. The fact that Éire could offer only a token defence against an attacker was not a consideration.

While Britain sought to return to the ports it had controlled, the language changed from access to the 'ports' to access to 'facilities'. Changing technology had made the defended ports less vital than before; airfields and flying boat facilities in the vicinity of defended anchorages were now what was needed.

This was to be at the centre of Anglo-Irish dialogue for the first three years of the war: Britain seeking facilities for its army and air force; Éire saying no. Amicable relations remained only because of the secret co-operation of Éire in supplying Britain with valuable information on German aircraft, submarines and other intelligence throughout the war as well as the quiet repatriation of grounded British and American airmen and planes. De Valera was insistent on maintaining proper protocol in any public dealings with Britain so as not to compromise the country's neutrality, but he was ever-willing to provide whatever assistance that could be given secretly.

Once the war started Britain was in the position that political and military leaders had feared for centuries: facing a war against a European enemy without an adequate defensive position off the west coast of Ireland. The political decision to return the Treaty Ports without any reciprocal defence agreement, but in the hope that Éire would provide facilities if they became necessary, would soon be tested.

De Valera lost no time in restating that Éire's position in a European war would be that of a neutral country and he emphasised this during the Dáil debate on the Emergency Powers Bill that was passed by the Oireachtas

in the early morning of 3 September. In the Senate debate, he also announced that Eduard Hempel, the German Minister in Dublin, had assured him two days earlier that Germany would respect Éire's neutrality.[1] The response of *The Times* newspaper to the announcement was puzzlement about how de Valera could hope to implement his policy in the light of the many anomalous situations that would exist between an independent Éire and the UK, especially with Northern Ireland.[2] The Irish newspapers reported the drama of the Oireachtas debates over the weekend that lasted until 4.50am but treated the outcomes without surprise.[3] The people wanted and expected the country to be neutral and had no desire to fight alongside Britain in any war. As de Valera described it, he 'did not think their policy of neutrality would come as a surprise to anyone.'[4]

The war cabinet in London promptly raised the problem of the loss of access to the treaty ports, and Eden was asked to continue discussions with de Valera to see if he could be persuaded to change his mind.[5] Churchill returned to the subject the following week when the cabinet was considering a report that a German U-boat had been captured off the south-west of Ireland and the German sailors were reported as having Irish cigarettes. He felt that this incident should give leverage to their argument for Berehaven to become a base for flying boats and destroyers.[6] He brought up the subject again a few days later, emphasising how important it was for the Admiralty to have access to Berehaven.[7] The cabinet agreed with him but were unwilling to create an open difference with de Valera. Soon after, Sir Dudley Pound, the Chief of Naval Staff, suggested asking de Valera for permission at least to base salvage tugs at Berehaven so that they could respond more readily to distress calls[8]- a request that was granted.[9]

Sir John Maffey, the newly appointed British representative in Éire, met de Valera on a number of occasions during this period and he wrote a

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[1] De Valera, *Seanad Éireann deb.*, xxiii, c.1052, 2 Sept. 1939.
[2] *The Times*, 4 Sept. 1939.
[3] *Irish Independent*; *Irish Press*, 4 Sept. 1939.
[4] *Irish Times*, 4 Sept. 1939.
[5] Cabinet minutes, 5 Sept. 1939 (TNA, CAB 65/1/3).
[6] Churchill, cabinet minutes, 15 Sept. 1939 (TNA, CAB 65/1/16).
[7] Churchill, cabinet minutes, 18 Sept. 1939 (TNA, CAB 65/1/19).
[8] Pound, cabinet minutes, 15 Oct. 1939 (TNA, CAB 65/1/48).
[9] Maffey, letter to Eden, 26 Oct. 1939 (TNA, CAB 66/2/47).

comprehensive report to Eden on his visits in which he described the difficulties of trying to negotiate with him, and the length of time that was spent discussing the semantics of the words 'minister', 'representative', and 'ambassador'.[10] In Maffey's words: 'he is a difficult man to interrupt, but interrupt him you must.'[11] De Valera wanted Maffey's title to be 'minister', but the British government insisted that the monarch could only appoint a minister to a foreign country so they could not consider the request. The title 'United Kingdom representative' was eventually agreed as an acceptable compromise but with de Valera's insistence that it be referred to as 'British representative' in regular parlance. Maffey's appointment was formally announced on 30 September, and interpreted by Joseph Walshe as indicating 'relations approximate to these existing between two sovereign but friendly neighbouring states'.[12]

Maffey returned to England with quite a positive view of de Valera and with a better appreciation of the conditions under which he was operating: 'He was known to be pro-British in sentiment on the question of the war...but it was a delicate balance. A clumsy step on his part would lose him much of that support.'[13] Maffey also acknowledged that despite his intransigence on any measure that would compromise Éire's neutrality, de Valera's intention was 'to maintain neutrality and to help us within the limits of that neutrality to the fullest extent possible.' He also added that de Valera 'is showing a definite bias in our favour, and we must be careful not to deflect it.'[14] In fact, Maffey had gained so many concessions from de Valera at his last meeting with him he reported that he took a decision to ignore his direct instructions to persuade de Valera to permit the use of the ports because he had been advised by Joseph Walshe that 'any mention at present of facilities at Berehaven would upset the apple-cart.'[15] In doing so, Maffey must have been very conscious of how Churchill might react to his decision because he added the comment: 'I hope the First Lord will understand this.'[16] In fact, Maffey's opinion of the

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[10] Maffey, memorandum to Eden, 24 Sept, 1939, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, vi, 42-3..
[11] Ibid
[12] Walshe, telegram to Sean Murphy, 30 Sept. 1939, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, vi, 60.
[13] Maffey, memorandum to Eden, 24 Sept, 1939, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, vi, 46.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.

decision to vacate the ports coincided with Churchill's. In a later interview in 1962, he described the decision as 'a fatuous gesture' and claimed that the General Staff were 'entirely to blame' for 'this incredible miscalculation'.[17] Also, his memory of the treaty seems to have been faulty because he claimed that 'The ports were British by treaty rights internationally recognised',[18] whereas, technically, the British only retained the defensive rights over the ports.

Then, the news of the sinking of the *Royal Oak* in Scapa Flow on 14 October 1939 by a German U-boat with the loss of 833 lives, including more than one hundred boy sailors, all under eighteen years of age[19], increased the pressure. Churchill insisted that Berehaven and Lough Swilly were now even more important in Britain's defences, and argued that 'the time has come to make it clear to the Irish government that we must have the use of these harbours, and intended in any case to make use of them.'[20] The situation was a repeat of the incident at the beginning of the First World War in which a battle squadron of the Grand Fleet sought refuge in Lough Swilly following fears of German U-boats in Scapa Flow. There was little doubt that the Royal Navy again did need an alternative sanctuary and it would have been natural for Churchill to be concerned, but even he realised that he had overreacted to the situation so when he returned the following day he declared to the cabinet that he had overstated the case since other anchorages were available.[21] Alternatives did exist, but none were as suitable as Berehaven or Lough Swilly and it was because of this the Admiralty had designated Berehaven as the main anchorage for the fleet in the event of war in the Atlantic in plans drawn up a few years earlier.[22] Churchill's outburst can be attributed partly to a new report by the Deputy CoNS, Rear Admiral Tom Phillips, that Churchill circulated to cabinet members, highlighting how destroyers and other escorting vessels and their crews based at Plymouth and Milford Haven were working at the extremes of their capacity and were unable to provide

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[17] *Irish Times*, 4 July 1962, Part 2 of a 3-part interview with Terence de Vere White.
[18] *Ibid.*
[19] David Turner, *Last dawn: the HMS Royal Oak tragedy at Scapa Flow* (Argyll, 2008), pp 96-7.
[20] Churchill, cabinet minutes, 17 Oct. 1939 (TNA, CAB 65/1/50).
[21] Minutes of cabinet meeting, 18 Oct. 1939 (TNA, CAB 65/1/51).
[22] Admiralty review of defence of ports at home and abroad, Nov. 1935 (TNA, ADM 116/3380)

protection to convoys for as far west as was needed.[23] Phillips argued that the situation could be relieved drastically and quickly by the Irish government allowing the Royal Navy and the RAF to use Berehaven.[24] This was a valid argument that the Admiralty continued to advance a year later:

> If destroyers were operated from Eire bases instead of from Londonderry we would be able to keep them out in typical operational area in much greater numbers than at present. In addition these ships would be able to operate 200 miles further out in the Atlantic...These factors would have a profound effect upon the course of events in the Atlantic and upon the safety of all these islands.[25]

Also, at an average convoy cruising speed of eight knots[26] this would have given the average escort vessel operating from Berehaven instead of Plymouth an extra twenty five hours as convoy escort. No British escort vessels at that time was able to make the Atlantic crossing without refuelling, so advance stations, as had to be established in neutral Iceland, were essential.[27] The cabinet was impressed by Phillips' argument and turned to Sir William Malkin, the legal adviser to the Foreign Office, to give his opinions on the legal implications for Irish neutrality if Phillips' plan were to be adopted. His opinion did not give any comfort. He was unequivocal in his advice that any move by Éire towards accommodating the Admiralty's needs would compromise their neutrality, with all the consequences that could ensue.[28] His only encouraging comment was that the Admiralty's objective might possibly be achieved if de Valera was prepared, 'under a certain camouflage of neutrality' to give what was needed 'by means of an extremely lax and indulgent application of the rules of neutrality'.[29] Otherwise, it would 'be inconsistent [for de Valera] with his maintenance of diplomatic relations with Germany' and that Éire would be unable 'to refuse facilities in their territory to German submarines or raiders'.[30] The Plans Division of the Admiralty had already come to this conclusion and their advice was that efforts should be

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[23] Phillips, memorandum 'The need for Berehaven' 16 October 1939 (TNA, CAB 66/2/43).
[24] Ibid.
[25] Admiralty minute by Director of Dockyards, 17 July 1940 (TNA, ADM 116/5631).
[26] Stephen Roskill, *The war at sea*, 1939-45 (3 vols, London 1954), *i*, 345.
[27] Ibid., p. 352.
[28] Malkin to Phillips, 19 Oct. 1939 (TNA, ADM 1/10366).
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

redoubled to persuade de Valera to shelve Irish neutrality to enable Berehaven to be used by flying boats and surface vessels.[31]

The cabinet asked Maffey to approach de Valera once again to see if he could be made to change his mind, using a persuasive argument written by Eden that he had based on Phillips' report.[32] Maffey visited de Valera, and his report of their conversation illustrates de Valera's intransigence perfectly. According to Maffey, de Valera accepted none of the arguments put forward, and described his responses thus: 'His uncompromising answer to every line of approach was a categorical "*non possumus*"' and that he had been 'talking to a man whose mind had been made up'.[33] The cabinet considered Maffey's report with ill-humour three days later. They agreed that there was little more they could do to persuade de Valera to soften his stance, and while they debated the possibility of taking the ports by force, they decided that, while this might be a realistic option, it would have repercussions in both the dominions and in the United States that would negate any benefit.[34]

The debate over Maffey's report was strained, and it exposed wide differences of opinion on how they should respond to de Valera's 'rigid and unsatisfactory attitude' (as it was described by Eden[35]) regarding access to facilities around the ports. Eden suggested that three options were open to the cabinet: to seek further discussions with de Valera; to acquiesce to de Valera and hope to gain further concessions bit by bit; to take the harbours by force—a course he did not advocate because of the adverse consequences that would ensue.

Churchill took the opposite view and discounted the first two options in favour of the third, arguing that the constitutionality of Éire's neutrality should be challenged, thus allowing Britain to insist on the use of the ports.[36] Neither Chamberlain nor Eden agreed with him, reiterating that Canada and South Africa held that they had the right not to fight alongside Britain if they so chose, and so would support Éire's right to do the same. Churchill became incensed at their attitude, repeating that it was necessary to consider using

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[31] Minute by J.H. Edelston, Director of Plans, 21 Oct. 1939 (TNA, ADM 1/10366).
[32] Eden, memorandum to cabinet, 23 Oct. 1939 (TNA, CAB 66/2/48).
[33] Maffey, report to Eden, 21 Oct. 1939 (TNA, CAB 66/2/48).
[34] Cabinet minutes, 24 Oct. 1939 (TNA, CAB 65/1/58).
[35] Minutes of cabinet meeting, 24 Oct. 1939 (TNA, CAB 65/1/58).
[36] Ibid.

force to gain the use of the ports, and that they should also consider excluding Éire from the Commonwealth and treat it as a foreign country.

The decision before the cabinet had been crystallised by George Dunn, the Head of Military [Branch, Admiralty] early in September when he summarised the opinions that had been expressed by J.H. Edelston, the Director of Plans at the Admiralty who had identified that

> the decision about respecting Irish neutrality was a political one. A real neutrality would preclude the use of the Irish ports as bases by our surface forces, without preventing occasional visits: the same applies to the enemy...The line of action seems mainly political: do we wish to conciliate Irish susceptibilities or are we indifferent to them...If we think that Irish hostility is no disadvantage, we can use their territorial waters as we like, but that would hardly enable us to use their ports as bases for obvious practical reasons.[37]

Both Chamberlain and Eden could see that treating Éire as hostile would nullify any advantage that might be gained by doing so. Churchill, on the other hand, was being his normal gung-ho self, prepared to take military action without weighing up either the political consequences or the serious military commitment that the Chiefs-of-Staff had advised would be needed for such a venture. Churchill, however, was wont to take advice on military strategic matters only when it agreed with his own.

The impasse was eventually ended by a fudged agreement on a three-course action: the Dominions Office Secretary to convince the other dominions that the use of the ports was essential for the security of the empire, and that Éire's attitude in the matter was 'intolerable'; to ask the Lord Chancellor to prepare a memorandum on the consequences of terminating Éire's membership of the Commonwealth; to ask the Dominions Secretary to prepare a memorandum, in consultation with all other relevant ministries, on the consequences of terminating Éire's membership of the Commonwealth.[38]

While these matters were being pursued, Churchill continued to exert pressure on Eden, even before he had finalised his report, to the extent of accusing him of 'untruthfulness' and—what was even worse in his eyes—of taking 'the side of Mr de Valera in the controversy'.[39]

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[37] Gunn, Admiralty, memorandum , 10 Sept. 1939 (TNA, ADM 1/10366).
[38] Minutes of cabinet meeting, 24 Oct. 1939 (TNA, CAB 65/1/58).
[39] Canning, *British policy towards Ireland*, p. 257.

While the cabinet was extremely disappointed with de Valera's non-co-operation, Maffey recognised that de Valera had made some significant concessions during his conversation with him. He listed these in a memorandum to Eden and they show just how far de Valera was prepared to compromise the principles of neutrality in Britain's favour so early in the war:

> Instant recording of the presence of German submarine in Dingle.
> Arrangement for immediate signalling to us of presence and whereabouts of enemy submarines.
> Acceptance of naval attaché with facilities for travelling and checking the efficiency of the Éire coast watch and ward service.[40]
> Holding up, at my request, a series of emergency orders implementing neutrality in detail.
> Retention of the Admiralty tug at Cobh.
> Acceptance of the fact that, whatever the regulations may be, our surface craft will pursue and attack hostile submarines in the territorial waters of Éire.
> Exclusion from instructions to coastal organizations of any mention of aircraft. Today our aircraft are flying over the headlands of Éire, and even inland, and nothing is being said.[41]

In fact, Maffey had returned to England with quite a positive view of de Valera, and with a better appreciation of the conditions under which he was operating. In his own words:

> the policy of neutrality commands approval among all classes and interests in Eire. It is remarkable how even the "pro-British" group, men who fought for the Crown and are anxious to be called up again, men whose sons are at the front today, loyalists in the old sense of the word agree generally in supporting the policy of neutrality.[42]

The final report of the Lord Chancellor, Lord Caldecote (formerly Sir Thomas Inskip) and the Crown Law Lords could not have been clearer: Britain could not exclude Éire from the Commonwealth without the agreement of the dominions, and that any action towards achieving that aim could backfire on Britain.[43] Eden's report, after consulting with the relevant ministries (a total of seventeen ministries and boards), was equally negative, especially for

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[40] The extent of the cooperation with the British naval attaché and other intelligence officers is well documented by Kennedy, *Guarding neutral Ireland*. It shows that the facilities granted to British intelligence throughout the war went considerably beyond the bounds of the accepted principles of neutrality.
[41] Maffey, letter to Eden, 26 Oct. 1939 (TNA, CAB 66/2/47).
[42] Ibid.
[43] Memorandum to cabinet, 7 Nov. 1939 (TNA, CAB 67/2/30).

Churchill.[44] Eden concluded by stating it was very doubtful that any pressure that Britain could bring to bear on Éire would induce the Irish government to accord the facilities sought, and that a likely consequence of any pressure would open a breach with Éire that would result in the loss of co-operation that Britain had been receiving.[45]

The cabinet discussed the two reports only very briefly on 23 November but despite the clear opinions expressed in them, and possibly in deference to Churchill's sensibilities, the cabinet decision was to put the matter on the long finger or, as described in the minutes, they 'deferred consideration of the memoranda.'[46] They felt able to do this because the situation in the Atlantic was evolving and because it was believed that they 'had obtained control over the U-boat menace in the Western Approaches and that it not be said that, in the present circumstances, the use of Berehaven constituted a vital interest.'[47]

However, by now the loss of Allied shipping sunk in the Western Approaches was serious, but it was sustainable. In other words, Britain was able to replace any shipping as quickly as Germany could sink it. While this continued, the British government was able to accept Éire's neutrality as a fact of life and, with it, the consequent non-availability of facilities on the south-west coastline. The COS, though, had not ruled out the importance of Berehaven as an integral part of their defence plans. They met on 26 March 1940 and discussed their 1938 plan for taking Berehaven. They were now of the opinion that a very much smaller force would be needed to capture and hold the defences, and they asked the JPS to re-examine the possibilities of occupying Berehaven as a naval base.[48] The JPS agreed that a substantially smaller force, comprising six infantry battalions with artillery support, two cruisers, and one destroyer, would be successful, (the average number of men in a British battalion in the Second World War was 850) but they added that one extra division would probably be needed to beef up the defences of Northern Ireland against possible retaliation by Irish forces. However, while agreeing that it was possible, they advised against it, regardless of the urgent

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[44] Revised draft of report of inter-governmental meeting, undated but 30 Oct 1939; Eden memorandum to cabinet, 20 Nov. 1939 (TNA, CAB 67/2/53)
[45] Ibid.
[46] Minutes of cabinet meeting, 23 Nov. 1939 (TNA, CAB 65/2/26).
[47] Ibid.
[48] COS to JPS, 27 Mar 1940 (TNA, CAB 84/11).

need that Berehaven was seen to be because they recognised that Irish opposition to a military occupation could mean that they would lose more than they could gain militarily by such a move.[49] The COS supported this view, agreeing that 'the present moment was unfavourable for taking any move to obtain the facilities at Berehaven.'[50] The Admiralty kept Berehaven on their agenda though, and in June 1940 drew up a comprehensive list of equipment that would be needed if Berehaven were to be used as a base for the fleet.[51]

Interest in the war now turned eastward where Russia was engaged in battle with Finland, and to Scandinavia where it had been discovered that Hitler had drawn up plans for the invasion of Denmark and Norway. In anticipation of Hitler's action, most of the U-boats in the Atlantic were transferred to the North Sea. Norway was the target because of the large quantities of iron ore that Germany imported. Britain was aware of Hitler's plan and decided to act first, ignore Norway's status as a neutral state, invade the country and take control of the mines. Unfortunately for Britain, Germany attacked on the same day that Britain had decided to act, 8 April 1940, and the invasion was so well planned and executed that the British action was left floundering. British operational plans were thrown into chaos, helped in no small measure by Churchill's continual interference in military and naval actions, his re-directing of ships without consideration of the consequences, and his countermanding of Staff orders to field officers.[52] The engagement was a disaster for Britain, losing 1 aircraft carrier, 2 cruisers, 10 destroyers, 6 submarines, 112 aircraft, as well as 2500 seamen drowned, 200 other servicemen killed and many others taken prisoner.[53]

The operation drew comparison with the shambles in the Dardanelles in the First World War where Churchill's interference in naval strategy cost him his job as First Lord of the Admiralty. He emerged unscathed from this disaster though, escaping criticism in the House in the debate that raged over two days on 7 and 8 May. The scapegoat was Chamberlain, who was forced to

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[49] Minutes of JPS meeting, 5 Apr. 1940 (TNA, CAB 84/11)
[50] Extract of minutes of COS meeting, 12 Apr. 1940 (TNA, ADM 1/10366).
[51] Director of Local Defences, 3 June 1940 (TNA, ADM 1/10741).
[52] Gordon Corrigan, *Blood, sweat and arrogance* (London, 2006), pp 180-201.
[53] Ibid., p. 196.

resign as prime minister because of the anger over the operation, only to be replaced by Churchill, the man who bore much of the responsibility for the fiasco. Lord Chatfield, the former First Lord of the Admiralty, and Minister for Co-ordination of Defence until the previous month, later said of the episode:

> Too many damned strategists who have a finger in the pie, all amateurs who change from minute to minute...very difficult to make war under such circumstances. We must get back to allowing soldiers to make the decisions.[54]

The 'phoney' war had come to an abrupt end, and when Germany invaded Holland, Belgium and France in May 1940, matters deteriorated further. The invasion of France made Britain's position perilous, and culminated in the 'colossal military disaster'[55] at Dunkirk which was only salvaged by the rescue of the 340,000 British and French soldiers over seven days from 26 May 1940.

Early in May, the Chiefs' of Staff first thoughts were that Germany would launch a sea and air invasion of England as soon as Holland was taken.[56] Then, during the Dunkirk crisis, they became concerned about reports of the possibility of an invasion using 200 fast motor boats each capable of holding 100 men, and they recommended that the Home Defence Forces should make immediate plans to meet such an eventuality along the south-east coast.[57] However, the COS had an even greater fear: that Germany would attack Éire with a view to setting up air bases there from which British west coast ports could be attacked.[58] They also believed that Germany could enlist enough IRA support to threaten the government—this, despite assurances by de Valera that the IRA would present no problem and from Walshe that any specific disturbances by the IRA 'were the kind of opportunity which they were seeking in order to crush finally the organisation.'[59] The most probable way of gaining a bridgehead would be to adopt the procedure that had been proven to be successful in Norway: land parachute troops to seize and secure landing grounds that could be used by following airborne troops.

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[54] Ibid., p. 199.
[55] Churchill, *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, ccclxii, col. 794, 3 June 1940.
[56] COS report, 'Seaborne and airborne attack on the UK', 10 May 1940 (TNA, CAB 66/7/33).
[57] COS report, 'Invasion of the UK', 29 May 1940 (TNA, CAB 66/8/8).
[58] COS report, 'Éire', 30 May 1940 (TNA, CAB 66/8/13).
[59] Minutes of meeting between reps. of the governments of Éire and the UK, 24 May 1940, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, vi, 223.

Germany was known to have the aircraft capable of carrying 9,000 men—and against an under-equipped Irish army any resistance they met would be overcome easily.[60]

Both the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee (JIS) and the Joint Planning Sub-Committee (JPS) were in little doubt that Germany would mount an invasion of Éire and establish bases from which to attack Britain[61] and the JPS hardened their assessment some weeks later when they stated that 'It is our view it is almost a foregone conclusion that, simultaneously with air attack on our east and south coasts we shall be faced with a Nazi descent upon Éire.'[62] The COS were so concerned about a German invasion of Ireland that they decided on 20 June that 'of the various commitments which we may have to meet outside the United Kingdom, first priority must be given to the defence of Éire against a German invasion'.[63] The General Staff were also concerned about an invasion of England, and when Churchill wrote to General Ismay, CIGS, in July suggesting that they would be able to deal with a naval invasion and that they were worrying unduly, he had such a firm rebuttal from Pound that he was forced to retreat.[64]

The possibility of invasion had been discussed at two meetings between Joseph Walshe and Col. Liam Archer for the Irish government and Sir Eric Machtig of the Dominions Office and two staff officers of the JPS for the British government at which Walshe confirmed de Valera's earlier message that there was no question of British troops being invited to Éire before an actual German attack.[65] British fears of a German airborne landing had been raised at a cabinet meeting a week earlier and Inskip was asked to convey these worries to the Éire government, but they re-affirmed their policy of not infringing Éire neutrality.[66] The possibilities of a German airborne invasion were fully discussed, and it was recognised that Éire would be very exposed if

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[60] COS report, 'Éire', 30 May 1940 (TNA, CAB 66/8/13).
[61] JIS report on Éire, 24 May 1940 (TNA, CAB 81/97); JPS report on Éire, 23 May 1940 (CAB 84/14/12); JPS report on Éire, 17 June 1940 (TNA, CAB 84/15/19).
[62] McMahon, *British Spies and Irish rebels*, p. 318, quoting JPS report 'Éire' (TNA, CAB 84/15).
[63] COS Aide memoire 'Éire: plans to meet a German invasion', 20 June 1940 (TNA, CAB 80/13).
[64] Minute by Churchill to Ismay, 10 July 1940; Note by Adm. D. Pound, n.d. (TNA, CAB 66/9/44).
[65] Minutes of meeting between reps. of government of Éire and reps of the Dominions Office and service departments of the UK, 23 May,1940, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy.*, vi, 217-22; Note by A.T.Cornwall Jones, secretary to JPS, 'Defence of Éire', 23 May 1940 (TNA, CAB 84/40).
[66] Minutes of cabinet meeting 14 May 1940 (TNA, CAB 65/7/16).

British troops were unable to take action until after a German attack had taken place. Walshe restated that there could be no change in government policy, but agreement was reached on a number of areas of co-operation. The main part of their agreement was for a system of wireless communication to be established between service staffs of the two countries, and that plans 'to ensure the closest of mutual co-operation be considered as soon as possible in the greatest secrecy'.[67]

Speed was of the essence if Britain's military aid to Éire was to be effective against a German invasion. Germany had demonstrated just how effective its paratroops were in the invasion of Norway and that once they were entrenched they were very difficult to move, and as Archer told British intelligence staff, a German airborne invasion of Ireland would be carried out easily and that the Irish Defence Forces 'would have no effective means of stopping the landing of troop carriers or parachutists'.[68]

In June 1940, the COS drew up plans for an invasion force to leave for Éire as soon as the first German move to invade was underway. A Royal Marine brigade was put on immediate alert and despatched to Milford Haven where ships and stores were ordered to be made ready.[69] It was expected that this force could not reach Éire until forty-eight hours after the Germans had landed and that the main force would not arrive until four to eight days later. This main force was to comprise the 3rd, 53rd, and 61st Divisions, fifty-two bombers, twelve fighter planes, and nine reconnaissance planes as well as 3,500 artillery guns and vehicles.[70] One of the prime objectives of the invasion force was the establishment of garrisons on 'the Shannon estuary, including the seaplane base at Foynes and the military aerodrome at Rineanna' and, secondly, at Queenstown and Lough Swilly.[71] The GOC-in-Chief, Northern Ireland was given command of the invasion force with instructions that if he

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[67] Minutes of meeting between reps. of government of Éire and reps of the Dominions Office and service departments of the UK, 23 May, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy.*, vi, 222.
[68] Kennedy, *Guarding neutral Ireland*, p. 95.
[69] COS memorandum 'Despatch of Royal Marine Brigade, 21 June 1940 (TNA, CAB 80/13).
[70] Directive to GOC-in-Chief, British Army forces in Ireland, 25 June 1940 (TNA, CAB 80/13). A COS aide-memoire for the cabinet dated 20 June 1940 gives the strength of the 53rd Division as 14,000 men and the 61st Division as 7,000 men. However, an undated copy of the minutes of a meeting of the Inter-Services Planning Staff in the same file, at which detailed preparations were formulated, states that the invasion force would comprise a total of 16,000 men.
[71] Directive to GOC-in-Chief, British Army forces in Ireland, 25 June 1940 (TNA, CAB 80/13).

was satisfied that a serious invasion by Germany had taken place, he was authorised to take action immediately without ministerial approval.[72]

By September, the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee (JIS) believed the most likely invasion plan to be a combined sea and air operation with the air operation targeted on Dublin, and the sea operation targeted on Waterford, Cobh, Bantry Bay, Shannon, and Galway Bay. They estimated that the numbers of men likely to be involved in an operation intended to extend the blockade of Britain would comprise three divisions of seaborne infantry, 8000 airborne troops plus reinforcements, a tank regiment of about two hundred tanks plus artillery and corps troops. They later had intelligence that at the time of their report there was enough shipping in French and Norwegian ports to accommodate these numbers.[73] Tension increased when a telegram was received from the British ambassador in Rome on 3 June 1940 that large numbers of Germans passing through Naples en route to Cadiz were part of an expeditionary force to invade Éire.[74]

A few weeks later, the COS decided that enough evidence had been accumulated to indicate an increased likelihood of an invasion of Ireland, and they updated their plans to counter this eventuality by allocating extra manpower (the 53rd Division) and artillery to their counter-invasion force.[75] Part of their evidence was an increasing build-up of dive-bombers that had been noted in northern France, which they judged to indicate the possibility of invasion.[76]

They were also of the view that while the threat of attack on the English coast might decrease with winter conditions, this would not necessarily be so for an invasion of Ireland. Accordingly, they advised the GOC-in-C Ireland that 'the needs of the defence of Ireland should receive a greater measure of provision.'[77] They also repeated the need for air facilities in Éire because they could not rely on air cover for their infantry forces against an invasion in the

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[72] Minutes of cabinet meeting, 1 July, 1940 (TNA, CAB 65/8/1).
[73] JIS report 'Possible scales of attack on Éire', 18 Sept. 1940 (TNA, CAB 81/98)
[74] Canning, *British policy towards Ireland*, p. 271.
[75] COS memorandum, 29 Oct. 1940 (TNA, CAB 80/21).
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

south-west of Ireland by aircraft based in England. The distance was simply too long, even for long-range fighter aircraft.[78]

Apart from invasion, the most serious problem that the COS saw was the loss of facilities at Berehaven. Naval facilities at Berehaven would have allowed the Royal Navy to establish an advanced destroyer and flying boat base that would have enabled convoy escorts to extend their stay with convoys a further 200 miles to the west, and allow submarine-hunting vessels to remain in their operational areas for an extra thirty hours.[79] The COS also resurrected their original plan for Berehaven to be a main base for cruisers and battleships if they were needed to provide cover for the other light vessels. The nightmare that the COS foresaw was of Germany taking control in Ireland, providing a base for attacking England and Northern Ireland, and establishing a base in the south-west that would become a grave threat to all Allied shipping in the North-Western Approaches.[80] The Admiralty raised this worry some months later when the Atlantic war was well underway.[81]

At this time, the U-boat campaign was escalating and Britain had no satisfactory answer to it. In fact, the First Lord of the Admiralty, A.V. Alexander, had advised the cabinet that shipping losses had become more serious and were now at the point where tonnage losses were exceeding the rate of replacements.[82] The first response to be made by the COS was that they 'may be forced to base naval and air forces on Éire, either in defence of our trade, or in defence of Éire territory, both vital to our existence.'[83] They also made the point that they did not have enough vessels for convoy escort and that the only way in which escort times could be extended was by having naval bases at Lough Swilly and either Berehaven or Shannon, a defended air base at Foynes, and the use of west coast ports by flying boats. In the event of invasion, they would need, additionally, base facilities for heavy cruisers and an aircraft carrier on the Shannon, and a fleet and air base on the Shannon.[84] Their synopsis of the problems that they saw before them was clear:

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[78] Ibid.
[79] COS report, 'Éire', 30 May 1940 (TNA, CAB 66/8/13).
[80] Ibid.
[81] Naval Staff memorandum 29 Aug. 1940 (TNA, CAB 65/11/22).
[82] Minutes of cabinet Defence Committee, 31 Oct. 1940 (TNA, CAB 69/1).
[83] Memorandum by COS, 'Base facilities in Éire', 6 Nov. 1940 (TNA, CAB 80/22).
[84] Ibid.

> Our trade is not only suffering from U-boat and air attack but is threatened by the growing concentration of enemy surface forces at Biscay ports. It is to be expected that the enemy will operate heavy ships from these ports against our Atlantic trade, and, should he do so, we would be forced to move complementary forces to a base in our South West. Unless an Eireann base was available our forces must operate from Plymouth or Milford Haven. These latter ports, in comparison to the River Shannon, are badly placed for interception; are within reach of enemy dive-bombers and long-range fighters; and do not allow much warning of air attack.[85]

To combat the situation, the COS decided, at a meeting five days later, to order the 36th Infantry Brigade to Northern Ireland but to hold the 3rd Division on alert in the UK while wooden hutted accommodation was built for it. At the same meeting, anxiety was expressed over a report that a German pocket battleship, the *Admiral Scheer,* was at large in the Atlantic (and had attacked a large convoy[86] on 5 November) and that the need for naval base facilities in Éire was becoming more pressing.[87] They recognised that they did not have the necessary forces to coerce Éire into granting them the facilities but they were in full agreement that the time had come for them to urge the cabinet to put pressure on Éire to force co-operation.[88]

The matter was raised again at a COS meeting two days later with a memorandum by Sir Dudley Pound warning that as all shipping was now being directed across the north-west, German naval forces were now able to leave their Biscay bases with a good chance of reaching Irish ports undetected.[89] In addition the continuing fears of a German invasion of Éire, Allied shipping in the north-western Atlantic was now being subjected to attacks from dive-bombers flying up the west coast of Ireland. These were outside the range of RAF fighter planes based in England so the German bombers had a free passage up the west coast of Ireland. Pound reiterated how air bases in Éire could combat this, and could also provide valuable, additional air reconnaissance capability in hunting U-boats.[90] (On 29 December 1940, the Irish Coast Watch recorded five or six German bombers

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[85] COS memorandum, 'Base facilities in Éire', 6 Nov. 1940 (CAB 80/22).
[86] Roskill, *The war at sea,1939-45, i*, 351.
[87] Minutes of COS meeting, 6 Nov. 1940 (TNA, CAB 79/7).
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid., 8 Nov. 1940.
[90] Ibid.

flying across Roscommon, Sligo, and Donegal Bay).[91] Pound was unable to attend the meeting because he was at a cabinet meeting at which he was carrying out the decision of the COS to impress on the cabinet how important they believed it to be to have facilities in Éire. Churchill was already frustrated at the meeting because of a statement by de Valera that had been widely reported in the press re-affirming that 'there can be no question of handing over any of these ports on any conditions so long as this state remains neutral'.[92] It was against this background that Churchill made his often-quoted speech in the House on 5 November:

> The fact that we cannot use the South and West Coasts of Ireland to refuel our flotillas and aircraft and thus protect the trade by which Ireland as well as Great Britain lives, is a most heavy and grievous burden and one which should never have been placed on our shoulders, broad though they be.[93]

Churchill never needed an excuse to complain about not being able to use the ports and facilities in Éire but even he knew that Britain did not have the forces to attack and occupy the country. Consequently, he proposed, and it was agreed, that Churchill would make a personal plea to Roosevelt to put pressure on de Valera, making the case that there was now a question of whether Britain could hold out for long enough without the treaty ports until American industry geared up to meet the Allies' need for armaments and equipment.[94] The COS were under no illusions about the difficulty in successfully invading Ireland, and they had made the cabinet fully aware of this:

> We would emphasise that we are not in a position to accept the military commitment involved by the use of force to achieve our ends. If, as is probable, such action led to the hostility of Éire, our army commitment would be of the order of 10 divisions, which we are quite unable to provide. Further, the adequate defence of the air base in the Shannon area depends on either Eireann co-operation, or the complete subjection of the Southern and Eastern part of the country.[95]

The overall situation had become critical for the Allies, losing more ships in the Atlantic than could be replaced; facing the prospect of a German

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[91] Kennedy, *Guarding neutral Ireland*, p. 114.
[92] Minutes of cabinet meeting 8 Nov. 1940, (TNA, CAB 65/10/5).
[93] Churchill, *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, 5 Nov. 1940, ccclxv, col. 120.
[94] Minutes of cabinet meeting, 8 Nov. 1940 (TNA, CAB 65/10/5).
[95] COS memorandum, 'Base facilities in Éire', 6 Nov. 1940 (TNA, CAB 80/22).

invasion of Ireland; and without any bases in the south-west from which an adequate defence could be mounted.

An invasion of Éire was not the only worry on the minds of the war cabinet. An invasion of England was also a likely possibility, and in Mid-June 1940, the COS were very apprehensive about some type of invasion of Britain, particularly one that would be accompanied by a major bombing offensive and by an attempt to starve the country by attacking ships and ports. The treaty ports were constantly on their minds, and among their recommendations to deal with the latter strategy they strongly urged that further attempts be made to enlist the support of Éire 'with a view to the immediate use of Berehaven'.[96] The COS had also advised the cabinet that 'most serious consideration should be given to the possibility of offering Éire political inducement' in order to achieve these ends.[97] The cabinet discussed using force to take the ports but discarded the idea, even Churchill stating that while they 'should not hesitate to take the ports' if they were needed, it would be unwise to do so for fear of unfavourable sentiment in the U.S.[98] The cabinet heeded the recommendation about political inducement, and Malcolm MacDonald was given instructions to put a proposal to de Valera exploring the possibilities of ending partition, and creating a united Ireland, in return for Royal Navy vessels having the use of Irish ports and for 'British troops and aeroplanes to co-operate with the Éire forces' in the country.[99]

MacDonald had met de Valera on 17 June and had a long conversation with him on possible ways in which Éire could be of assistance to Britain, and on the likelihood of Éire being invaded by Germany, but he left the meeting somewhat depressed because he had been unable to get de Valera to change his mind on this issue.[100] De Valera was worried about what might happen, and MacDonald remarked on how his demeanour had changed from before, and how depressed and tired he seemed, and how 'he had neither the mental nor physical vigour that he possessed two years ago.'[101] Coincidentally,

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[96] COS report 'Urgent measures to meet attack', 19 June 1940 (TNA, CAB 66/8/43).
[97] COS report 'Invasion of the United Kingdom', 29 May 1940 (TNA, CAB 80/12).
[98] Minutes of cabinet meeting, 16 June 1940 (TNA, CAB 65/7/63).
[99] Memorandum handed to MacDonald, 26 June 1940 (TNA, CAB 66/9/13).
[100] Note of conversation between Eamon de Valera and Malcolm MacDonald, 17 June 1940, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy.*, vi, 234-43.
[101] Ibid.

Eduard Hempel had visited J.P. Walshe earlier the same day to assure him that Germany's fight was exclusively against Britain, but also said that 'in pursuing this object there may be a possibility of her touching Irish interests.'[102] In other words, Irish ships sailing in Allied convoys would continue to be targets for U-boats.

However, with Germany having ignored the neutral status of Norway, Denmark, Holland, Luxembourg, and Belgium within recent weeks, Hempel's assurance would have carried little weight, especially as he added that he could not ask his government 'to make a statement saying that they would not make use of Irish territory in their attack on England.'[103] Against Germany's assurances, de Valera was to state after the war that he could not get an assurance from Britain: 'I tried to get from them an assurance that there would not be an attack by them on this country, but I did not get that assurance. There was always a reservation.'[104]

MacDonald again met de Valera, this time with Lemass and Aiken, on 27 June and put the proposal to them of removing partition in Ireland in return for British ships, airplanes, and troops to be allowed onto Irish territory. He also added that Éire would not be expected to declare war on Germany..[105] De Valera and his two colleagues raised a number of objections to the offer, not the least being that Craig had not been consulted about it, and MacDonald returned to London. In response to the objections and discussions at two further meetings, Chamberlain, who was responsible for the negotiations, wrote to de Valera with amended clauses, two of which stated:[106]

> (Clause i) A declaration to be made by the United Kingdom government forthwith accepting the principle of a United Ireland. This declaration would take the form of a solemn undertaking that the Union is to become at an early date an accomplished fact from which there shall be no turning back.
> (Clause iv) The government of Éire to invite British naval vessels to have the use of ports in Éire, and British troops and aeroplanes to co-operate with the Éire forces and to be stationed

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[102] Walshe memorandum to de Valera, 17 June ,1940, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy*, vi, 232.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Dwyer, *Behind the Green Curtain*, p. 68.
[105] MacDonald memorandum to cabinet, 28 June 1940 (TNA, CAB 66/9/13).
[106] Geoffrey Roberts, 'The British offer to end partition, June 1940' in *History Ireland*, ix, no.1 (Spring, 2001), pp 5-6.

> in such places in Eire as may be agreed between the two governments, for the purpose of increasing the security of Éire against the fate which has overcome Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg.

According to Geoffrey Roberts, de Valera did not show the amended proposals to his cabinet, and wrote to Chamberlain on 4 July rejecting them on the grounds that they compromised Éire's neutrality without giving a guarantee of a united Ireland.[107] It is unlikely, however, that de Valera's decision was based solely on whether the British government would have been able to deliver on the commitment to end partition. Germany's military might was all-conquering, without a visible opponent with the strength to withstand its advance, and Britain had been shown to be militarily inept in its attempts to confront the enemy. In other words, Britain was facing defeat. The advice de Valera was getting from his officials was unequivocal: 'Britain's defeat has been placed beyond all doubt...neither time nor gold can beat Germany...all the smaller states of Europe...are abandoning her [Britain]'.[108] The Irish embassy in Washington was equally pessimistic: 'The general view here is that England has now little or no chance of avoiding defeat';[109] 'the general view here is that the Nazis will invade England and defeat her.'[110] The cabinet were aware of the Irish government's thinking. Chamberlain stated that the Irish government 'were taking the view that Germany was invincible', leading to a fear that if Germany were to invade Éire, the Irish would not offer any defence.[111] A few months later Churchill declared that 'it was now more unlikely than ever that Éire would declare war on Germany' if attacked.[112]

In this scenario, any thoughts about whether Britain could deliver on ending partition were academic. Survival was now the prime concern, and it would not have been sensible to abandon neutrality and become engaged in war with an ally that was all but defeated against an enemy that was almost invincible. One analysis of Éire's neutrality is more specific:

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[107] Ibid.
[108] Walshe memorandum to de Valera , 21 June 1940, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy,* vi, 249-50.
[109] Robert Brennan confidential report to J.P. Walshe, 3 July 1940, in *Documents on Irish foreign policy,* vi, 268.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Chamberlain, minutes of cabinet meeting, 2 July, 1940 (TNA, CAB 68/8/3).
[112] Churchill, minutes of cabinet meeting, 8 Nov. 1940 (TNA, CAB 69/10/5).

> Up to May 1940, strict adherence of neutrality was based partly on a naïve assumption that Britain could survive comfortably and act as the state's strategic guarantor without the use of Irish facilities, and from the fall of France until the summer of 1941 on the belief that Germany would win and that Ireland must not antagonize her.[113]

Churchill did not have any direct involvement in these proposals but his acquiesence in them is evidence of how bad Britain's situation was and in his belief that defence facilities in Éire were absolutely essential if a German invasion was to be avoided. It is an indication of how worried Churchill (and the COS) must have been if he was prepared to abandon Northern Ireland and see it become part of a united Ireland while under his watch as prime minister.

The frustration in political circles at the non-availability of bases in south-western Éire continued. The Defence Committee made yet another request to the COS in July to re-consider the case for the immediate occupation of Cobh.[114] The request was considered by the JPS and they reported that, as had been already decided, that although Cobh would be of benefit as a base for light forces, it was no longer of prime importance, in part because it could not accommodate capital ships.[115] They had also advised that if Irish bases were needed, Berehaven and Shannon would be much more suitable because they could comfortably accommodate a large number of capital and light ships. In addition, they made the point that air bases had become of increased importance in combatting German bombers and that it had now become very desirable to station a line of fighter squadrons along not only the south coast of Ireland but along the east coast as well. However, they advised against any forcible attempt at recovering the ports and they concluded by emphasising that the seizure of a base 'might well precipitate the hostility of Ireland on a large scale and play into the hands of the Germans.'[116]

Interestingly though, an undated Admiralty report (probably early June) had foreseen this eventuality. In a review of Éire's defences, they restated the

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[113] O'Halpin, *Defending Ireland*, p. 256.
[114] Note by W.G. Stirling, secretary to JPS, 18(?) July 1940 (TNA, CAB 84/16).
[115] Aide memoire by JPS, 'Implications of an immediate occupation of Queenstown', 21 July 1940 (TNA, CAB 84/16).
[116] Ibid.

reasons why Berehaven was so vitally important: its advanced position to meet attacks in the western Atlantic; its value as an advance base for refuelling depot, allowing escorting duties farther out in the Atlantic; its value as an advance base for anti-submarine strike forces; its immunity from attack by aircraft based in Germany.[117] However, the review now argued that the choice of naval bases in Éire must take account of the enemy being in control of northern France. Against such an enemy, Berehaven would still be the best strategically placed base but it 'lacked an aerodrome so essential for air defence and so desirable for the use of the aircraft of the fleet. On balance, it is therefore considered that Shannon should be our first choice for a capital ship base in Éire.'[118] This decision was reviewed by the JPS in October at Churchill's instigation and they confirmed it, emphasising the benefits of a possible fighter aircraft base at Shannon, and arguing that the Shannon estuary would be more easily defended from attack by dive-bombers.[119]

Maffey had been instructed that Berehaven was considered to be the most suitable port for naval use and that in any discussions the 'Admiralty view is that Berehaven should be given first preference.'[120] In response to the new defence review, he was sent fresh instructions that the Shannon estuary was now considered to be the most suitable, primarily because of its proximity to Rineanna aerodrome, and that he should now ask de Valera if it would be made available.[121] There was one dissenter to the Admiralty's new plan, however, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Charles Martin Forbes. He voiced his opinion that Berehaven was 'an admirable harbour' and that Shannon would be preferable only if the RAF fighter protection could be provided – which was exactly what was being proposed.[122] It has been argued that the need for Berehaven as a base for the main fleet was 'purely an invention of Churchill's'[123] but, in fact Maffey's instructions were based on Admiralty

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[117] Admiralty review 'Naval bases in Éire', undated, but likely June 1940 (TNA, ADM 116/5631).
[118] Ibid.
[119] JPS report, 'Possible use of Irish ports', 20 Oct. 1940 (TNA/ CAB 84/20).
[120] Cypher telegram to Maffey, 8 June 1940 (TNA, ADM 116/5631).
[121] Telegram to Maffey, 27 June 1940 (TNA, ADM 116/5631).
[122] Forbes, most secret cable to Admiralty, 6 July 1940 (TNA, ADM 116/5631).
[123] Canning, *British policy towards Ireland,* p. 249.

defence policy at least as far back as 1935 that Berehaven would be the most suitable base for the fleet in a future war.[124]

The RAF was consulted about the matter, and their reply was unequivocal. The Shannon basin provided for a greater depth of air defence; it had a good aerodrome and was on a site that could be developed; it was the location of an excellent flying boat base at Foynes. They had also looked at an aerodrome in Tralee but decided it was too far from Berehaven, and a possible site at Skibbereen was found to be too small for development.[125] Almost two years earlier, the JPS recognised the potential importance of a seaplane base in Bantry Bay and urged the Dominions Office to see what could be done about it in advance of a proposed meeting with de Valera. [126] The RAF repeated the request in December 1939, emphasising how valuable a flying boat base in Bantry Bay would be.[127]

It is worth noting that the defence staff of the Irish Army agreed with this assessment. In an extended memorandum for Frank Aiken in February 1941 they made the comment that 'at the same time it can be contended that with adequate adjacent airfields the German raiding plane could be repelled without occasioning irreparable damage to those harbours [Cobh and Berehaven] and their forts.'[128] They also add, however, that even if Britain had air facilities in the area, they would expect that convoys would continue to be diverted northwards.

In the end, the invasion of neither country happened, but while the immediate worry passed, it did not disappear. The German plan for the invasion of Britain, 'Operation Sealion', was postponed following Germany's failed attempt between July and October 1940 to destroy Britain's air capability. Nevertheless, British General Staff fears of a German invasion increased after the RAF success in the Battle of Britain, especially as a build-up of dive bombers had been noted in north-western France, along with considerably increased activity off the Irish coast.[129] This was particularly

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[124] Admiralty review of defence of ports at home and abroad, Nov. 1935 (TNA, ADM 116/3380).
[125] Air Ministry to Admiralty, 21 Aug. 1940 (TNA, ADM 116/5631).
[126] JPS report 'Co-operation of Éire', 15 Sept. 1939 (TNA, CAB 104/24).
[127] H.A. Jones, Air Ministry to C.W. Dixon, Dominions Office, 7 Dec. 1938 (TNA/ CAB 104/23).
[128] Memorandum on Defence Forces paper prepared for Frank Aiken, 'British claims to the Irish ports', n.d. but probably Feb. 1941 *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy ,vii, 14.*
[129] COS memorandum 'Invasion of Ireland', 25 Oct. 1940 (TNA, CAB 81/98; CAB 80/21).

worrying because these aircraft were outside the range of British fighter aircraft and they would have had a free run at their targets.[130] By now, however, fears of an invasion were slowly dissipating, even Churchill's. In February 1941, he sent a 'personal minute', that had been drawn up by his military adviser General Hastings Ismay, to the COS, in an attempt to persuade them that an invasion of Ireland as a prelude to an invasion of England would not be a sensible move for Germany to make.[131] Apart from the damage that would be inflicted on German shipping, it would instantly set the Irish against Germany and allow Britain to come to Ireland's defence.[132] Churchill was forced to concede to the COS, though, that Germany 'could bring a heavier scale of air attack on the Clyde and the North-Western Approaches from bases in Éire than they can at present.'[133] He also agreed that the COS continue a study on moving a division to Ireland in '5 or 6 days'.

There had also been a German plan for the amphibious invasion of Ireland, 'Operation Green', that was to have been implemented alongside 'Operation Sealion'. It has been argued, though, that the plan was never seriously intended to be implemented because not enough troops or equipment were allocated to it and that its purpose was merely to stretch Britain's defence preparations in advance of 'Sealion'.[134] This does not mean that the occupation of Ireland was not considered by the German staff to be worthwhile. Hitler took a personal interest in the matter and in December he ordered Admiral Raeder to investigate the possibilities of occupying Ireland because he believed it 'might lead to the end of the war'.[135] However, he also made it clear that this would be done only if Ireland requested help. Raeder was able to scrap the idea on the grounds that it would be impossible to mount such an operation even with Irish co-operation because of the supremacy of the Royal Navy, although he did see it as a possibility as part of, or a diversion for, an invasion of Britain.[136]

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[130] Ibid.
[131] Churchill, 'Prime Minister's personal minute' to COS, 17 Feb. 1941 (TNA, PREM 3/327/2); (TNA, CAB 80/26).
[132] Ismay, 'Prime Minister's personal minute' to COS, 17 Feb. 1941 (TNA, PREM 3/327/2).
[133] Ismay, letter to Churchill, 22 Feb. 1941 (TNA, PREM 3/372/2).
[134] Fisk, *In time of war*, pp 192-3.
[135] Ibid, p. 193.
[136] Fisk, *In time of war*, p. 194.

There was yet another German plan, this time to invade Northern Ireland in early 1941, that was sidelined because Hitler turned his attention to war in the east. It was drawn up by General Kurt Student, a Luftwaffe expert on airborne operations, and he assured Hitler that an air invasion 'is no longer a problem' and that 32,000 airborne troops could be landed using 400 planes.[137] The benefit that Student foresaw was the possibility of destroying British industry and harbour installations by the Luftwaffe and of using Irish harbours from which to attack the northwestern ports of Britain.[138]

Shipping losses in the north Atlantic decreased in December 1940, not because of improved convoy protection, but because bad weather hampered the activities of U-boats. To counter this, U-boats were moved south to attack shipping off Portugal and off Freetown where air and surface anti-submarine activities had not been properly organised.[139]

Churchill began considering economic sanctions against Éire in December 1940 as a means of exerting pressure on de Valera to relent over the ports. There had been discussions over a number of months between the two governments on a wartime trade agreement, but it had not been possible to agree terms. Churchill felt there could be an opportunity to capitalise on this and, with the help of Sir Kingsley Wood, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord Cranborne, the newly-appointed Dominions Secretary, and with the support of the COS, they agreed to prepare a plan to restrict the supply of commodities, especially petrol, to Éire.[140] The plan which was drawn up by Wood was to allow Irish and neutral ships to continue to avail of the protection of British convoys, but the British government would no longer charter ships to the Irish government, and British vessels engaged in shipping goods to and from Éire would gradually become unavailable.[141] Also, it was to be emphasised to the Irish government that these measures were being undertaken with great reluctance, and were necessitated by British needs and

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[137] Dan Bryan papers, incomplete manuscript entitled 'Stadhunt [sic] plan for invasion of Northern Ireland', undated (UCD Archives, P71/47). Bryan was of the view that Student was a man whose 'opinion must be treated with considerable respect'.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Roskill, *The war at sea,1939-45, i,* 353.
[140] Minutes of cabinet meeting, 6 Dec. 1940 (TNA, CAB 65/10/2).
[141] Minutes of cabinet meeting, 2 Jan. 1941 (TNA, CAB 65/17/1).

that the action was taken 'in no vindictive spirit and only dire necessity forced us into such a step.'[142]

Cranborne had written a memorandum for the cabinet in which he fulminated at the inequity of how life in Ireland was carrying on almost as normal, with no bombs, no blackouts, no conscription. People still socialised normally, had to endure only the mildest of rationing, and apparently, had unlimited supplies of petrol.[143] Cranborne was doing no more than giving voice to the British public's perception of Éire's attitude towards the war.[144] Supplies were getting to Éire because they were being transported on British ships that had run the gauntlet of U-boats and dive bombers in the Atlantic and which had been refused even a modicum of protection by Éire by refusing to make facilities available to the navy and air force on the west coast. By putting the squeeze on these supplies, and making daily living more austere in Éire, it was hoped that de Valera would eventually be forced to relent. The news of this action was taken very seriously in Ireland, and resulted in a two day debate in the Dáil and a radio broadcast by de Valera.[145]

De Valera was not in any mood to change the national policy on neutrality and he had the overwhelming support of the Dáil. It is possibly a coincidence, but within a matter of days of the British government implementing its new policy, it was reported by Cranborne that the Irish government had given permission for British flying boats based on Lough Erne to fly across Irish airspace to reach the Atlantic (the 'Donegal Air Corridor') and for British civil flying boats en route to America, west Africa, and Lisbon to land at Foynes and refuel.[146] A few months later, Cranborne also reported that shop window and display lighting was prohibited after closing time (which the British government had been requesting for many months), and that arrangements had been made for the broadcasting *en clair* of the movements of unknown aircraft over Éire (but excluding those using the Donegal Air Corridor).[147]

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[142] Ibid.
[143] Canning, *British policy towards Ireland,* p. 299, quoting Cranborne memorandum 3 Dec. 1940.
[144] This is a subject that has been well-covered by Wills, *That neutral island,* pp 117-21, 126-9, *passim.*
[145] *Dáil Éireann deb..*, lxxxi, cols 1312-1465, 1470-1740, 16-17 Jan. 1941.
[146] Cranborne, 'Report for the month of Jan. 1941', 17 Feb. 1941 (TNA, CAB 68/8/13).
[147] Cranborne, 'Report for the month of May 1941', 23 Apr. 1941 (TNA, CAB 68/8/13).

While the immediate threat of invasion of Ireland or Britain had receded somewhat by early 1941, the loss of shipping in the Atlantic continued, although Britain had managed to increase the average number of escorts accompanying convoys from one to two,[148] the losses were still a cause for worry. In fact, the first hard intelligence that Hitler may have abandoned any idea of invading the British Isles was not obtained by British planners until January 1941, but this did not cause them to make any immediate changes to their assessments.[149] The COS saw no answer to their problems other than being allowed access to facilities in Ireland, and they returned to the matter in March 1941 with a strongly-worded memorandum in which they expressed concern over their inability to do more about protecting shipping, and they impressed on the cabinet that 'increased protection can only be given by operating our naval and air forces from bases in Éire nearer to the area of enemy attack.'[150]

This was at the time that the cabinet focussed on combatting the threat in the north Atlantic and a coordinated plan was finally drawn up that involved the three armed services[151] – purposely named the Battle of the Atlantic to evoke the success of the Battle of Britain. They pointed out that the problem was being compounded by concentrating all traffic into the narrow North-Western Approaches and that the number of German bombers attacking convoys had been increased by diverting long-range bombers from night-bombing of targets to attacks on shipping. They were also worried that German heavy vessels could concentrate their forces in the Biscay ports and add to the attacks on shipping. They re-affirmed their earlier argument[152] that air bases in Ireland for squadrons of fighter aircraft would allow them to attack the German bombers as they flew along the west coast of Ireland. In addition, they stated the necessity of having both light and heavy warships in Shannon to counter the possible threat of German capital ships, and also for bombers and reconnaissance aircraft at Shannon. The need for heavy ships to be based in Shannon was because Milford Haven and Plymouth were too far

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[148] Roskill, *The war at sea*, 1939-45, *i*, 352.
[149] O'Halpin, *Defending Ireland*, p. 176.
[150] COS memorandum to cabinet, 'Necessity of bases in Éire', 8 Mar. 1941 (TNA, ADM 66/15/32).
[151] Cabinet memorandum , 'the Battle of the Atlantic', 18 March 1941 (TNA, CAB 66/15/35).
[152] Admiralty review 'Naval bases in Éire', undated, but likely June 1940 (TNA, ADM 116/5631).

away to be able to respond effectively. They concluded that with such facilities at Shannon 'it may even prove possible to re-open the South-Western Approaches'.[153]

This reasoning contradicts the widely-held view in Ireland that the need for bases in Éire disappeared once all traffic was diverted northwards.[154] It is notable that neither Queenstown nor Berehaven were mentioned in the COS report, indicating how the importance of aircraft had increased and how Shannon had become the prime objective.

It has also been argued that moving the convoys to the North-Western Approaches greatly reduced the pressure on the British fleet and Fighter Command to protect British trade, making less imperative the need for bases in Ireland.[155] This reasoning disregards how concentrating all traffic through a narrow funnel made it much easier for U-boats to locate and attack shipping, especially as German reconnaissance aircraft based in France now had a free run northwards along Irish air space.

Britain's problem was that she had too few long-range aircraft for reconnaissance work that could be allocated to Derry because Churchill, and the Air Staff, would not relent in their bombing campaign against German facilities and cities. Coastal Command had some Blenheim fighter-bombers but these were too slow and too weakly-armed to be effective against the Focke-Wulf Condors.[156] The Admiralty had an underlying problem in that the Air Ministry continued to believe that the primary role of aircraft was to engage in offensive missions, especially strategic bombings of land targets, and had little time for the use of aircraft for reconnaissance missions or convoy escort. It was the policy that Churchill wanted to hear, so maritime air resources were hostage to the good will of an unsympathetic Air Staff.[157] It was not until February 1943 that that the Admiralty's requests were heeded

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[153] COS memorandum to cabinet, 'Necessity for bases in Éire', 8 Mar. 1941 (TNA, CAB 66/15/32).
[154] Wills, *That neutral island*, p. 132.
[155] Canning, *British policy towards Ireland* , p. 283.
[156] Roskill, *The war at sea*, 1939-45, *i*, 352.
[157] David McGregor, 'The use, misuse, and non-use of history: the RN and the operational lessons of the First World War', in *The Journal of Military History*, lvi, no. 4 (Oct. 1992), p. 612.

when the Anti-U-boat Warfare committee agreed to the supply of forty American Liberator Very Long Range (VLR) aircraft to the Royal Navy.[158]

France's collapse, following the German army's advance on Paris on 13 June 1940, followed by the collapse of the French government on 16 June, had brought about a complete change in the geopolitics of the war. The strategy of a year earlier with France as an ally against Germany had changed. Britain was now in a position that had not been anticipated by military planners, and was again faced with the strategic situation that it faced for two hundred years: confronted by an enemy coastline a short distance from its own shores and extending far into the Atlantic. This time though, there was one significant difference in that it was meeting an enemy without the benefit of the buffer of Ireland and its centuries' old perimeter defences in the treaty ports. Germany was now in control of all the major naval bases on the French north and western coasts and Admiral Dönitz lost no time in establishing submarine pens and docks capable of accommodating fifty U-boats at any one time at Brest, L'Orient, St. Nazaire, La Pallice, and Bordeaux.[159] This was recognised by Lt-Gen. Dan McKenna, the Irish COS, as late as 1943 when he wrote 'our territory occupies a position of such strategic importance in regard to Great Britain, to the continent of Europe and to the Atlantic, that an attack on this country by Axis powers remains a constant danger.'[160]

During the inter-war years when the War Office continually tried to relieve itself of the financial burden of the defended ports, it was still recognised by its military planners that the ports had a defensive role in a war against France. In 1929, General J. Charles of the War Office tried again to convince the Admiralty to agree to vacate the ports. In his argument, that was based mainly on the financial consideration, he asked the rhetorical question: 'What is the war in which Berehaven and Cork Harbour may become of first-class importance to the Royal Navy?' Charles answered the question himself: 'There seem to me to be only two situations in which Berehaven and Cork

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[158] Duncan Redford, 'Inter-and intra-services rivalries in the Battle of the Atlantic', in *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 32, no. 6 (Dec. 2009), p. 918, quoting TNA,CAB 86/2, 13 Nov. 1942.
[159] Jean Kessler, 'U-boat bases in the Bay of Biscay', in Stephen Howarth and Derek Law (eds), *The Battle of the Atlantic, 1939-1945*, (London, 1994), p. 589.
[160] Kennedy, Laing (eds), *The Chief of Staff's reports*, p. 181.

Harbour will assume such importance, namely, war against America and war against France.'[161]

The Treaty Ports had been built as a defence against French invasion and it was now facing that danger, not from France, but from an aggressor in control of France, and was doing so without the benefit of those defences. The Royal Navy was the armed service that had been at the front line of Britain's defence for almost three centuries, so it is not unnatural that it would be the service that felt most exposed by the loss of facilities in Éire. It was not foreseen in 1929 that air power, and the importance of air power to the Admiralty in particular, would prove to be so vital in the Second World War, but that does not detract from both the War Office's and the Admiralty's argument of the benefit of defensive facilities in Éire in a war against an enemy on French soil.

In 1940-1941, once Germany had direct access to the Atlantic, all major surface vessels and U-boats were deployed against traffic in British sea-lanes, and air reconnaissance and bombing was made easier for German planes. At the start of the war, Germany had only fifty-seven U-boats all told and no more than half of them were suited to Atlantic conditions.[162] Of these, only about twelve were at sea for the first ten months of the war with just six were in sectors in which the campaign against Britain was being waged.[163]

Yet, this tiny force was so effective that the Allies were made to channel all convoys away from the south of Ireland towards the North-Western Approaches to escape aircraft and U-boat attack from bases in France.[164] One consequence of this was that with all convoys being funnelled through a single narrow channel they became easier to detect. In fact, from June to December 1940, U-boats sank 298 vessels in the North-Western Approaches.[165] In May 1941, the *Bismarck* was sunk (mainly because a seaplane, based at Castle Archdale on the east bank of Lough Erne, using the Donegal Air Corridor

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[161] Gen. J.Charles, 'Note on the south Irish coast defences', to Capt. R.M. Bellairs, Dir. of Plans, 31 July 1929 (TNA, ADM 178/161).
[162] Geoffrey Till, 'The battle of the Atlantic as history' in Stephen Howarth and Derek Law (eds), *The Battle of the Atlantic, 1939-1945* (London, 1994), p. 589.
[163] Kessler, 'U-boat bases in the Bay of Biscay', in Howarth and Law (eds.), *The Battle of the Atlantic*, p. 252.
[164] Memorandum by Naval Staff, 29 Aug. 1940 (TNA, CAB 66/11/22).
[165] Patrick McCarthy, 'The treaty ports and the Battle of the Atlantic', in *The Irish Sword*, xxviii, no. 111 (Dublin, 2011), p. 90.

spotted it) and Hitler decided against the deployment of heavy vessels in the Atlantic and ordered all of them to the North Sea where he was expecting another Allied attack on Norway.[166] From this time on, the U-boats stood alone in the campaign against shipping convoys.

Dönitz had insisted from the beginning that three hundred boats would be needed to ensure success. With the fall of France, he got agreement for these to be built. He never received the 300 vessels, but by January 1943 he had 212 operational submarines under his command of which 164 were assigned to the Atlantic.[167] This was too little, too late, and despite the serious damage inflicted by his few U-boats operating in the latter half of 1940 (the 'Happy Time' for U-boats), by December 1941, when America finally dropped its pretence of neutrality and declared war, the Kriegsmarine had lost the race against time against an enemy whose resources were being increasingly augmented by the inexhaustible resources of America that had been flowing for the previous twelve months.[168]

The Admiralty decided to use Lough Foyle as a main base in November 1940 and air facilities began to be developed on an extensive scale in the locality, culminating in the major expansion from December when the U.S. became fully committed to the war. By now, the urgent need for facilities in Éire had dissipated and the Allies concentrated their efforts in the extensive facilities that were becoming available in Northern Ireland. Admiral Godfrey, Director of Naval Intelligence, summed up the feeling that prevailed about the Treaty ports: 'by the end of 1941 the matter was dead as far as we are concerned, somewhat to the disappointment of the Irish, who talked about their ports incessantly.'[169]

In May 1943, the U-boat campaign in the Atlantic was broken off, largely because of Hitler's ill-considered invasion of the Soviet Union, but also defeated by improved weapons capability, an effective convoy system, and superior intelligence through the capture of the Enigma code machine that gave the Admiralty notice of U-boat locations and allowed for convoys to be

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[166] Werner Rahn, 'The campaign: the German perspective', in Stephen Howarth and Derek Law (eds), *The battle of the Atlantic, 1939-1945* (London, 1994), p.539.
[167] Ibid., p. 547.
[168] Ibid., p. 550.
[169] Admiral Godfrey memoirs, quoted in McMahon, *Republicans and Imperialists*, p. 234.

diverted.[170] The Battle of the Atlantic was over. The need for air and naval facilities in Éire was gone.

A further development occurred in 1943 that caused additional problems for what remained of the U-boat campaign. In August that year, the British government came to an agreement with the Portuguese dictator, Salazar, for British naval and air forces to be granted facilities in the Azores, in the mid-Atlantic. Portugal was a neutral country in the war and Salazar had delayed giving way to British demands until the Allies began to gain significant victories and to assume a position of supremacy.[171]

The U.S. was even more interested in facilities in the Azores because it was so conveniently located in mid-Atlantic and was ideally placed to service the ships and planes transporting thousands of men and equipment across the Atlantic to Europe. Salazar did not come to a formal agreement with the U.S. until November 1944 but the Americans used the facilities as allies of the British from October 1943 in return for the supply of war material and other aid.[172]

While the news about the British using the Azores was breaking, Sir John Maffey had a discussion with de Valera at which the subject arose. Maffey recorded how shocked de Valera was at the news: 'his expression plainly revealed the inner feeling that he had somehow been let down by Salazar,' and said that 'he [de Valera] felt it would look as if he were climbing on the band wagon' if he were to make any more concessions to British demands about releasing British airmen who had crash-landed in Ireland.[173] A few days later, Maffey re-affirmed de Valera's disappointment at Salazar's decision, believing it to be totally inconsistent with neutrality.[174]

Joseph Walshe followed up this matter when restating to the German Minister to Ireland how Ireland's neutrality would not be compromised by

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[170] Rahn, 'The campaign: the German perspective', in Howarth and Law (eds), *The battle of the Atlantic*, p. 551. For a detailed account of Ireland's involvement in the 'Phoney War' off the west coast of Ireland and in the subsequent 'Battle of the Atlantic', see Kennedy, *Guarding neutral Ireland*, pp 93-161.
[171] Luis Nuno Rodrigues, *Crossroads of the Atlantic: Portugal, the Azores, and the Atlantic Community, 1943-1957*, undated, (www.academia.edu/349890).
[172] COS memorandum, 11 July 1943 (TNA, CAB 80/29).
[173] Maffey, Report 'RAF internees in Éire', 14 Oct. 1943 (TNA, DO 130/32).
[174] Maffey, Telegram to Dominions Office, 18 Oct. 1943 (TNA, DO 35/2077).

'participation on the side of the Allies' while complaining about insinuations that Ireland might try to emulate Portugal's action.[175]

Shortly after the war ended, Maffey entertained a party of people to lunch in his home. One of the guests was Frank Gallagher, the head of the Government Information Bureau. During the meal, Gallagher, who Maffey described as 'congenitally anti-British' and someone who 'has persuaded himself that he is always right' opened up and 'launched forth into a diatribe against that feature of American and British "propaganda" which endeavoured to claim that Allied naval interests were adversely affected by not having the use of the Irish ports.'[176]

This is a matter that has drawn the attention of many historians and other interested commentators in Ireland ever since, with the majority view agreeing with Gallagher, although in a more temperate manner. One contrary view describes there being 'a cosy Irish consensus that neutrality had no negative consequences for the Allied war effort'.[177]

The arguments for why the non-availability made no difference are well-known: the German occupation of France made the Irish ports superfluous;[178] the Allies had Lough Foyle and the land around Derry; 'the need for Berehaven as a base for the main fleet [was] purely an invention of Churchill's';[179] air bases in Ireland would have provided no extra protection for ships on the northern route; English bases provided greater protection against capital ships based in France;[180] if the ports had really been a matter of life and death, Britain would have taken them;[181] and the almost universal belief that granting the facilities would provoke widespread nationalist upheaval or civil war.

Many of these arguments have a degree of validity (except that the need for Berehaven was an invention of Churchill's) but most of them ignore how the Allies would have benefitted if even some facilities had been available. The

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[175] Eunan O'Halpin, 'According to the Irish minister in Rome…': British decrypts and Irish diplomacy in the Second World War, in *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, vol. 6 (1995), p. 100.
[176] Maffey, letter to Sir Eric Machtig, 2 Aug. 1945(TNA, DO 35/2089).
[177] McMahon, *British spies and Irish rebels*, p. 330.
[178] McCarthy, 'The treaty ports and the Battle of the Atlantic 1939-45' in *The Irish Sword*, pp 86-7 *et al.*
[179] Canning, *British policy towards Ireland*, p. 249.
[180] Dwyer, *Behind the green curtain*, p. 338.
[181] Kennedy, paper 'The treaty ports as a geopolitical and international relations issue' UCC, 29 Nov. 2008.

likely consequences for Ireland had those facilities been made available have all been well-rehearsed: bombing by the Luftwaffe; nationalist uprising; invasion by Germany, or Britain, or both. These matters are not in question. Neither is it a question of whether de Valera should have brought the war to Ireland against the wishes of the people, nor whether or not it was right, morally or politically, to remain neutral. These are separate but related issues. What is to be asked is whether or not the loss of facilities in Ireland had any adverse effect on the Allied efforts in the war; whether or not the loss made it more difficult to overcome the German threat, and whether the loss of lives and ships was also a consequence of being denied access to the ports.

In the circumstances, the weight of evidence shows that the denial of facilities did have adverse effects, but with the massive build-up of American forces in Northern Ireland, they did not have an effect on the final outcome of the war.

When considering why this is so, it is necessary to understand that by the time de Valera came to power in 1932 and during subsequent negotiations on the return of the ports, British defensive needs had undergone change and were not focussed exclusively on the ports and defended forts. It had become recognised that Cobh's importance as a strategic necessity was no longer a priority, and that air power had assumed increasing importance. In this regard, the ancillary clause in the annex to Article 7 of the 1921 treaty, 'facilities in the neighbourhood of the above ports for coastal defence by air', assumed a greater significance. In 1921, air power was not foreseen to have the potential it had developed by 1939 so the wording of the treaty was necessarily non-specific. However, the wording in Article 7 (see appendix) itself is more encompassing, specifying that 'such facilities as may from time to time be agreed between the British Government and the Irish Free State', and 'in time of war or other strained relations with a foreign power such harbour and other facilities as the British Government may require for the purposes of such defence as aforesaid.'

By 1938, the emphasis, especially by the Admiralty, was on 'facilities' being made available rather than an exclusive focus on the ports. This point was stressed by Lord Caldecote, the Dominions Secretary, in a cabinet

memorandum in 1940 when he stated: 'We talk of the ports; that is a generic term.'[182]

When Chamberlain agreed to return the ports to Ireland, he did so in the forlorn hope that the facilities would be made available if, and when, the need arose, and in the knowledge that any attempt to use them in war without the agreement of the Irish government would provoke a response that would negate any benefit.

Contrary to widespread belief, the Admiralty never changed their opinion that the ports and ancillary facilities in Ireland were of strategic importance. Even in their last major contribution to the debate in January 1938, they made this clear to the cabinet, and the First Sea Lord, Chatfield, reminded Hankey some months later that they had agreed to the return of the ports only on condition that there be a joint defence agreement with Ireland.[183]

The argument that Berehaven became superfluous to defence needs once Germany controlled the French coast because convoys were simply diverted across the northern route is flawed. It is a *post factum* argument that ignores the circumstances that prevailed at the time. From the summer of 1940 to the spring of 1941 there were serious concerns about a German invasion, and without harbours and airfields in south-western Ireland the country was very vulnerable. The Irish army, although not short of numbers, was under-resourced, under-equipped, under-trained, and would not have been able to repel a determined German onslaught.[184] Anxiety about this gap in coastal defence continued until the threat of invasion dissipated. As the Admiralty had always held, harbour facilities in Berehaven would have enabled a fleet of heavy ships to counter a build-up of German heavy ships in the Biscay ports.

Nonetheless, while this fear did not materialise, the loss of shipping to U-boats and planes in the latter half of 1940 was unsustainable. Many of the losses were of ships steaming alone, frequently because they were stragglers,

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[182] Caldecote, cabinet memorandum, 'Necessity for base facilities in Éire', 19 Mar. 1940 (TNA, CAB 66/15/37).
[183] COS report, 'Defended ports in Ireland', 12 Jan 1938 (TNA, CAB 27/527).
[184] Peter Young, 'Defence and the new Irish state, 1919-1939', in Dermot Keogh and Mervyn O'Driscoll (eds.), *Ireland in World War II* (Cork, 2004), pp 21-35; Theo Farrell, 'The model army: military imitation and the enfeeblement of the army in post-revolutionary Ireland, 1922-1944' in *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, vii (1997) (www.jstor.org), pp123-127

unable to keep speed with a convoy, and left to fend for themselves because a shortage of convoy escorts meant that an escort could not be detached from a convoy to assist any stragglers (as happened from the summer of 1917 in the First World War). In fact, the winter seas of 1940 saw an increasing number of stragglers who were unable to cope with the unusually stormy weather.[185]

In 1940 and 1941, Britain had much too few corvettes and destroyers to provide adequate protection for convoys[186], so the longer an escort vessel could stay in the danger zone or stay with a convoy, the greater its protection would be, (convoy vessels were unable to accompany a convoy for the full journey across the Atlantic). In a post-war exercise, the Admiralty calculated the additional time that would be afforded to vessels based in south-west Ireland compared to Derry. They calculated that vessels based in Berehaven would have been able to operate 200 miles farther out into the Atlantic.[187] Corvettes and destroyers would have had a twenty per cent and twenty-one per cent increase respectively in times saved to arrive in the area, and a fifteen and thirty-five per cent increase in times a ship could remain in an area. They also calculated that if there had been an air base at Shannon the loss of ships and lives would have been reduced by about five per cent.[188] In actual figures, this represented approximately 368 ships and 5070 lives that would have been saved. The Admiralty also produced a map showing, in coloured circles, the positions of destroyers and cruisers from the alternative bases in Scotland, Derry, and Berehaven every four hours after leaving the bases. This illustrates graphically the extra sweep and distance that would have been achieved by vessels based in Berehaven. (see map next page).

However, of greater concern was a critical shortage of air cover both for reconnaissance and for defence. The benefit of reconnaissance aircraft in spotting U-boats, forcing them to submerge, and warning ships of their location, had proved itself very quickly. Unfortunately, Coastal Command had

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[185] Rahn, 'The campaign: the German perspective', in Howarth and Law (eds), *The battle of the Atlantic*, p.548

[186] In 1917 when convoys were introduced Britain had 339 destroyers and 2,798 auxiliary craft, extending to 433 destroyers by the end of the war, excluding American vessels. In August 1940, Britain had 181 destroyers. Memorandum by Naval Staff, 29 Aug. 1940 (TNA, CAB 66/11/22).

[187] Memorandum to the UK representative in Éire on the use of bases for naval and air forces in Ireland, 17 June 1946 (TNA, DO 35/2089); Admiralty memorandum to Sir John Stephenson, Dominions Office , undated (TNA, ADM 116/5631).

[188] Ibid.

a serious shortage of long-range and very long-range aircraft for reconnaissance in the Atlantic – a shortage caused by Churchill and Bomber Command's obsession with using all available bombers to bomb German towns and cities. It was also a fact that most ships were being sunk at the limit of the range of both escorts and aircraft. Being able to extend the outer limit would have forced the U-boats to hunt over a wider area and, so, make it more difficult for them to find targets. An Air Ministry post-war analysis of Coastal Command records of sightings and attacks on U-boats illustrates this.[189] During the period from the outbreak of war to the fall of France in July 1940 sightings by flying boats based at the Mountbatten and Pembroke dock were:

	Sightings	Ships sunk
Between 100 and 200 miles	11	15
" 200 and 300 miles	1	33
Outside 300 miles	3	48

From the period August 1940 to March 1941 a similar picture emerges, with 75 per cent of all sightings continuing to be within a 200-mile radius of bases in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Only 6 ships were sunk within this area while another 22 were sunk in an extension of the 200-mile belt that would have been covered from Foynes.

It has been shown how being able to base flying boats on Lough Erne and to fly through the Donegal Air Corridor, rather than flying north to avoid Irish airspace, then turning westwards, made an enormous difference to their capabilities, by saving two hours flying time to get to the same position.[190] When the *Bismarck* was reported to be in the north Atlantic, the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force pulled out all the stops in an attempt to sight it. The *Bismarck* had almost reached safety when it was spotted and shadowed by two Catalina aircraft operating from Lough Erne. They were almost at the point of having to return to base because they were running short of fuel when

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[189] Memorandum to the UK representative in Éire on the use of bases for naval and air forces in Ireland, Appendix 1, 17 June 1946 (TNA, DO 35/2089); Admiralty memorandum to Sir John Stephenson, Dominions Office , undated (TNA, ADM 116/5631).
[190] Kennedy, *Guarding neutral Ireland*, p. 141.

one of the planes spotted the *Bismarck*.[191] The subsequent sinking of the *Bismarck* was not just a great loss to Germany: it gave a huge boost to British morale just when it was needed. It has also been pointed out how the Lough Erne activities underlined the importance of Ireland's geopolitical position for Coastal Command[192] and that 'arguably, the war in the Atlantic might have been very different had it not been for the existence of the air corridor.'[193]

This being so, it follows that if there had been even a single squadron of fighter planes in Rineanna and some flying boats at Foynes the difference would have been greater still.

It has also been argued that air bases in Éire would have provided 'no extra protection for ships taking the more popular northern route' and that 'aircraft bases at Eglinton and Lough Erne were superior to any possible bases in the Irish Free State.'[194] It is also argued that moving convoys to the northern route 'greatly reduced the pressure on the British fleet and fighter command to protect British trade, thus making less imperative the need for bases in Ireland.[195] None of these arguments sustain scrutiny. Focke-Wulf Condors were flying up the west coast of Ireland unmolested, on their way to bomb shipping in the north-west or to seek convoys. The only aircraft that could be used to attack the Condors were Mosquito fighter-bombers based at Aldergove aerodrome, Northern Ireland, but, as has been recorded, reports of the approach of German aircraft within the range of their base were received

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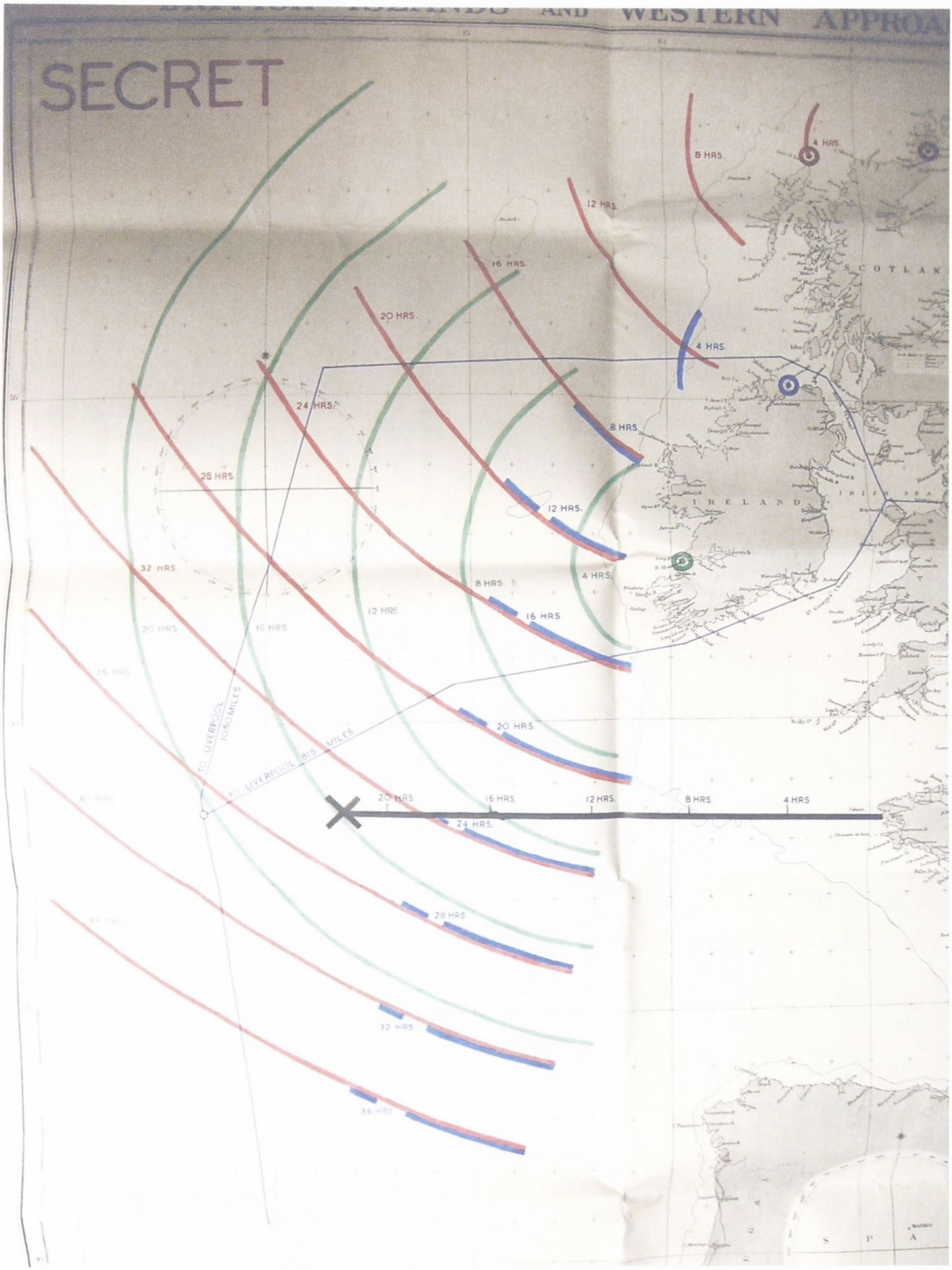
[191] Ted Jones was an RAF pilot who was stationed at Lough Erne for the last two years of the war, and in a personal interview he gave an indication of the stress to which flying boat crews were subjected . Generally, *Catalinas* were based at Killadeas on the east bank of Lough Erne and *Sunderlands* were at Castle Archdale , a few miles away. The normal operational flight time for *Catalinas* was eighteen hours but this was frequently extended to twenty-four hours. This put great stress on all crew members but especially the navigator and pilot, and this increased in winter-time when daylight hours were reduced. *Catalinas* were equipped with strong searchlights to aid night-time searching for U-boats and they also had radar, although it was in its infancy then. Despite having the best radio equipment available, all *Catalinas* carried two homing pigeons on board in case of emergency. Maximum off-duty time was twenty four hours, which was not enough to allow for recovery. *Catalinas* at Killydeas spent most of their time protecting the northern Russian convoys routes while aircraft at Castle Archdale used the Donegal Air Corridor. (Personal interview with Flight Lieutenant Ted Jones, 26 Apr. 2012). Ted is a remarkable man. He is now 90 years of age, and he still has a valid pilot's licence. In fact, he still flys *Catalinas* at least once a year, the last time being in June 2012.

[192] Kennedy, *Guarding neutral Ireland*, p. 148.

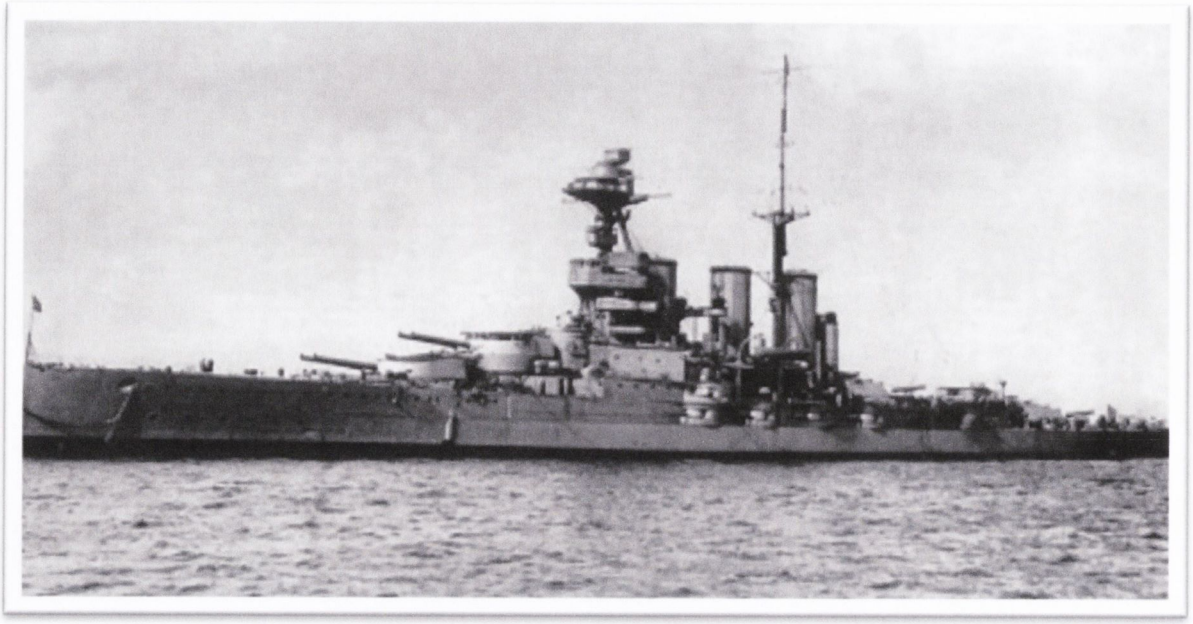
[193] Ibid., p. 161.

[194] Dwyer, *Behind the green curtain*, p. 338.

[195] Canning, *British policy towards Ireland, p. 283.*



This map is with an Admiralty report in Dominions Office file DO 35/2089 on the consequences of the loss of access to facilities in Éire for naval and air defences. It appears to be associated with a note entitled 'Appendix 1' in this file and in Admiralty file ADM 115/5631 on the same subject (which has no map). The text of the note states: 'Typical operational area is taken as being 50^0N.22^0W. For comparison cruisers are assumed as based and refuelled at Clyde, destroyers, corvettes at Londonderry, and these bases are compared with the use of Shannon for all three types of ships...'.. It is presumed that the black horizontal line is intended to illustrate the travelling times of U-boats based at Ushant.



LONDONDERRY SENTINEL. THURSDAY MORNING. JUNE 26. 1930.

H.M.S. Tiger in Lough Swilly.

Above
The battle cruiser HMS *Tiger*

Left
HMS *Tiger* in Buncrana Lough Swilly on 26 June 1929.
(Photo: Londonderry Sentinel)

Bottom
Officers from HMS *Seawolf* berthed at Kingstown Harbour 7 August 1929 on a visit to coincide with the Dublin Horse Show.

Officers of H.M.S. Seawolf, a destroyer of the Reserve Fleet employed in Irish waters. The Seawolf is at present moored in Kingstown Harbour. Left to right: Lieutenant J. Newsham, Lieutenant (E.) A. Bruce, Commander H. M. Hughes, Lieutenant W. J. Nixon and Commander Gunner (T.) J. P. Wilson.

HMS *Tenedos*, (left) and HMS *Sesame, (below)* *two* of the several Admiralty 'S' class destroyers that patrolled regularly in Irish waters in the 1920s and 1930s. These ships were 84 metres in length, had a beam width of 8.15 metres, and a top speed of 36 knots. They carried a complement of 90 men. Their design was notable for the high bridge which was located behind the break in the main deck.

A Sunderland flying boat that was based on Lough Erne. Built in Belfast by Short Brothers, it was one of the best and most powerful flying boats used throughout the Second World War. They were capable of flying 4,800 kilometres at a cruising speed of 225kph.

A Catalina flying boat of the type that was based at Killadeas and Castle Archdale, Lough Erne during the Second World War. Catalinas were widely used multi-role aircraft and were used by all branches of the American armed forces. They had a crew of eight, a maximum speed of 320kph, and were capable of flying 4,000 kilometres at a cruising speed of 200kph.

Most of the aircraft on the strength of three Coastal Command squadrons are visible in these two photographs, out of the water at Castle Archdale when Lough Erne froze over in January 1945. More than 30 Sunderland and Catalina aircraft can be seen. *(photo above: Imperial War Museum; photo below: Seawings Flying Boats).*

too late for the Mosquitos to be able to intercept them. In fact, not a single German plane was intercepted from Aldergrove during 1940.[196]

A squadron of fighter planes in Rineanna could have scrambled very quickly and attacked the Condors both on their way north and on their return (although many of them had to return via Norway if they were short of fuel). Their presence in Rineanna would also have caused the Condors to make a detour westwards, and thus curtail their time in the target areas. The value to Coastal Command of having fighters in Rineanna was recognised even by General Richard Mulcahy. He said, of the Condors invading Irish airspace: 'nests of fighters jumping off the west coast of Ireland could be very destructive, and could practically stop any great volume of this.'[197] The American Joint Chiefs of Staff accepted this, even though they saw no great advantage in having access to the three ports at the time. Cordell Hull, the U.S. Secretary of State advised David Gray, the U.S. ambassador in Éire, that the War and Navy Departments ' have difficulty in foreseeing the value of bases or if they would definitely use the,'[198] but in their report to Roosevelt in August they included that statement:

> Air operations against the European continent would not be appreciable [appreciably] facilitated by the uses of bases in Éire except that bases for fighter planes in southwest Éire would be of advantage to the theatre commander as bases to which he might move his fighter planes to oppose German air attacks on Allied convoys if they should be routed south of Ireland.[199]

The Air Ministry calculated that air counter-measures to the U-boat fleet at the time were effectively confined to the 200-mile limit and that possession of Irish bases would have extended the boundary to include an area in which fifteen ships were sunk between the outbreak of war and July 1940. From this they further calculated that forty per cent of fifteen ships (six ships) would have been saved.[200] Between August 1940 and April 1941, seventy five per cent of all sightings of U-boats were within 200 miles of Derry

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[196] Trevor Allen, *The storm passed by: Ireland and the Battle of the Atlantic* (Dublin, 1996), p. 56.
[197] Fisk, *In time of war*, p. 260, quoting 'UCDA, Mulcahy papers P7/C/113 de Valera interview 20.1.41'.
[198] Cordell Hull to David Gray, 13 Sept. 1943, *in Foreign relations of the United States diplomatic papers, 1943.* vol.iii (http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1943v03).
[199] Gen. George Marshall for Joint COS to Roosevelt, 11 Aug. 1943, Ibid.
[200] Memorandum to the UK representative in Éire on the use of bases for naval and air forces in Ireland, 17 June 1946 (TNA, DO 35/2089); Admiralty memorandum to Sir John Stephenson, Dominions Office , undated (TNA, ADM 116/5631).

and only six or seven ships were sunk within this area. Another twenty two ships were sunk in an extension of the 200 mile belt that would have been covered from Foynes. With no changes in the German dispositions, this would have resulted in nine ships being saved.[201]

The most recent article to deny that the loss of facilities had no effect on the loss of shipping is an impressive analysis but disputes the Air Ministry figures.[202] The main argument is that the figures are the 'biggest calculated impact of the availability of facilities in Éire' and that, in any event, neither the Admiralty nor the Air Ministry had the aircraft and ships to move to facilities in Éire, so they would have been unable to avail of any facilities.[203]

In their comprehensive post-war analysis of the consequences of their inability to access facilities in Éire the Naval and Air Staffs summarised their findings:

> (a) Our anti-U-boat forces could have operated over a larger area and thus greater protection could have been given to our convoys and merchant shipping.
> (b) Had air cover been available, merchant shipping could have been routed round the south of Ireland. This would have increased the difficulties of the U-boats in locating their targets, and would have reduced the congestion in the ports in the Liverpool – Clyde area.
> (c) Radar cover could have extended over the waters to the south and west of Ireland, This, with the co-operation of fighter aircraft would have reduced the enemy's air reconnaissance of our trade routes, which was of great value in directing U-boats on to their targets.[204]

It is when these conclusions are considered in isolation, without associating them with any perceived rights or wrongs of Ireland's stance on neutrality during the war, that it can be understood why defence facilities in Ireland were believed to be so important to Britain and why the Admiralty, and later the Air Ministry, continually sought access to them.

Éire's policy of refusing Britain and the Allies to have access to the Treaty Ports or to other defence facilities during the war had just one objective: to ensure that the country would not be drawn into the war and not

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[201] Ibid.
[202] McCarthy, 'The treaty ports and the Battle of the Atlantic 1939-1945', in *The Irish Sword*, pp 75-99.
[203] Memorandum to the UK representative in Éire on the use of bases for naval and air forces in Ireland, 17 June 1946 (TNA, DO 35/2089); Admiralty memorandum to Sir John Stephenson, Dominions Office , undated (TNA, ADM 116/5631).
[204] Ibid.

give Germany an excuse to invade or bomb the country. The policy was successful but there is little doubt that Germany would have ignored Éire's neutrality, as it ignored the neutrality of many other European countries, if it suited it purposes.

De Valera had no desire to be involved in the war, but even if he had, he would have had little choice in the matter. Both the country and the Dáil were totally against any such move and he would have had no support whatsoever if he had taken any action that would have imperilled the country. Nevertheless, Éire's public stance on neutrality throughout the war and its steadfast refusal to allow facilities to the Allies ensured that there was little sympathy for the country after the war. Also, de Valera's action in expressing sympathy to the German minister in Dublin on Hitler's death only succeeded in drawing down further opprobrium from all of the Allied countries that had suffered in the war. It was also a matter of considerable irritation that while Éire had refused to help the Allies, the country continued to rely on Allied and neutral ships to transport essential supplies across the Atlantic. Moreover, the secrecy that surrounded the extensive, and valuable, help that Éire gave to the Allies ensured that there was no propaganda to counter the negative image of the country in the immediate post-war years.

Conclusion

The terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty that allowed for the continuing presence of the British army and navy in Irish territory were approved by the Dail and subsequently by a majority of the people. However, in neither case was the majority vote an overwhelming one, and memories of the War of Independence and Black and Tan activities in it remained in the public consciousness. Also the bitterness of the Civil War ensured that anti-British sentiment remained high in many quarters.

Despite this, the presence of British troops in the ports does not seem to have been of concern to either the people or to politicians. Socialising and trading between locals and troops was common throughout the 1920s and 1930s – although most of the socialising was with Protestants, as evidenced by the number of dances that were held in parochial halls. Servicemen, in and out of uniform, mingled freely with locals, and even though they might not have been welcomed by all, they were at least tolerated. This extended beyond the environs of the ports, as shown by Garda reports of the numbers of Irish men in the British forces who wore their uniform while on leave at home, although the practice became more discouraged by the later 1930s as negotiations over the return of the ports intensified and the prospect of war increased.

The Royal Navy was always more popular than the army, possibly aided by not being tainted by the legacy of involvement in some of the incidents of the War of Independence, but mainly because of many years' experience of close association with Cobh, Berehaven, and Lough Swilly. The welcome received by Royal Navy ships around the country, and the efforts by local communities to attract warships to their towns is also evidence of little antagonism being shown towards the navy.

There are no accounts of attacks on British troops or sailors in the ports' areas except for the one serious attack in Cobh in so, the picture that emerges shows a local population that exhibited varying degrees of welcome, acceptance, toleration, or indifference to the military personnel and British control of the ports defences.

While there may have been strong resentment about the British presence in the ports there is little evidence that there was any serious republican threat towards them. Even the rise in republican agitation in the

1930s was never strong enough to be of major concern, although the military command on Spike Island did have worries about rumours of attacks on the Cork forts and there was concern in Whitehall about a republican threat. The general standpoint was reflected in the attitude of the Donegal and Cork Fianna Fáil TDs, all of whom were strongly republican, whose attention to local politics outweighed any concerns they may have had about the ports.

The departure of British troops from the ports inevitably meant a loss of trade for local merchants and business. The loss was more acute in Cobh than in Buncrana or Berehaven, where the number of troops was fewer than in Cork, and where there was a regular ferry service from Spike Island and easy onward passage to Cork city. However, the loss of trade was not permanent because it was soon to be replaced by the Irish troops that replaced the departed British.

Even with the relationship that had existed over the years, the departure of British troops was welcomed by the vast majority of Irish people. It was another visible sign of the ending of Britain's influence over the country and of Ireland's growing independence. The departure of troops from Spike Island on 11 July 1938 was a formal affair attended by Irish government ministers but was not witnessed by large crowds. An Irish Times account on the day before the handover reported that 'to the public here the change seems to mean but little, and only the politicians seem to be thrilled at the prospects for tomorrow,'[1] but its account the following day recorded that several thousand people waited in Cobh to welcome de Valera and his ministers on their return from Spike Island.[2] The formal handover in Dunree was witnessed by no more than a dozen spectators, while none witnessed the handover in Berehaven[3] – although the isolation of these venues may have influenced numbers of spectators. The political importance of the handovers was underscored by an event of major political significance that happened in Europe at the same time as the transfer of Berehaven and Lough Swilly – the signing of the Munich Peace Treaty.

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[1] *Irish Times*, 11 July 1938.
[2] *Irish Times*, 12 July 1938.
[3] *Irish Press*, 30 Sept., 4 Oct. 1938; *Irish Times*, 30 Sept., 4 Oct. 1938; *Irish Independent*, 30 Sept., 4 Oct. 1938.

At a political level, it is evident that once the terms of the Anglo-Irish agreement were signed in 1921 and the treaty was implemented, the reserved ports receded from political minds. Even the defence review that was to have taken place five years later never happened because neither government pursued the matter with any degree of enthusiasm. This suited the British government very well but the lack of zeal displayed by the Irish government in using the opportunity to gain some concessions is an indication of how the issue of the ports did not rate highly on their agenda. This was matched by the public's relative indifference towards British control over the ports during the inter-war years, or of the British military personnel based in them.

For the British government it was unthinkable that Britain's western defences could be under the control of any body other than the Royal Navy. This had been their thinking for over two hundred years, and their experience of World War One, when the country had come so close to being defeated by a relative handful of U-boats cemented that thinking even more. In other words, not only must the ports be retained, but the new Irish state must not be allowed even a sinecure of a navy – the public outcry against such a move could well have been strong enough on its own to allow such a matter to be considered. Éire could never have had a navy that could have been a threat to the Royal Navy, but submarines were not very costly vessels and the thought that Éire might possibly acquire some and be able to target British facilities was a thought that could not be entertained by British politicians or public.

Everything changed when de Valera came to power in 1932, and he began to ramp up the pressure on the British government in his efforts to dismantle the treaty. His insistence on the country remaining neutral, which had the support of all parties in the Dáil, gradually exposed the weakness in the treaty that would have prevented the status quo remaining. As events in Europe from the mid-1930s made another major European war more and more likely the weakness became fully exposed.

Éire was a newly independent state that was determined to demonstrate its independent status to the world, and was adamant that it would not be involved in another war in which it would have neither say nor influence. In such a war, there was no possibility that Germany would have recognised Ireland's neutrality as long as there was a British military presence in the country, and the country would have become involved whether or not it wanted to be involved. Consequently, de Valera's priority was to remove all

British forces from the country to ensure that there would be no ambiguity about the country's position.

No country's leader could realistically take their country to war without the support of the people, and de Valera was well aware that the overwhelming desire of the Dáil and the people was to stay out of any war, especially one in which the two major European powers were engaging once again. In fact, there is a general consensus that it would have caused a civil war if Ireland were to have become involved. Garret FitzGerald has been even more categorical, believing that de Valera's skilful handling of negotiations leading to the return of the ports in 1938 'may well have saved us from what could otherwise have been a renewal, in a new and sinister form, of the earlier Civil War – this time pitting our three democratic parties against an IRA probably bolstered by breakaway Fianna Fáil support, and externally supported by Nazi Germany'.[4]

Britain, on the other hand, was between the proverbial rock and a hard place – believing in the necessity of having access to defence facilities on Ireland's western seaboard, but recognising that access would not have been worthwhile without the willing support of the Irish people. Chamberlain accepted the reality of the latter view, and took the brave decision to hand over the reserved ports to Ireland without any conditions, knowing that he was acting against the advice of the Admiralty and that his decision would receive a hostile reception in Westminster.

For the British politicians and military leaders who were concerned about Britain's defences, the Treaty Ports were not part of the infrastructure of a wholly independent country: they were an integral part of the defences of the United Kingdom, as they had been for so many years. Churchill captured the sentiment sublimely in his speech in the House in the debate on the bill that extinguished the treaty in 1938. He described what the ports meant to Britons:

> These ports are, in fact, the sentinel towers of the western approaches, by which the 45,000,000 people in this Island so enormously depend on foreign food for their daily bread, and by which they can carry on their trade, which is equally important to their existence...these are not ports which are part of the

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[4] Garret FitzGerald, *Irish Times*, 27 June 2009.

coastal defences, they are the life defences of the crowded population of England.[5]

This is why the ports were so important, and it is why Britain, and Churchill in particular, did everything possible – other than invade Ireland– to gain access to facilities in Ireland in the Second World War to protect its lifeline to the wider world. Unfortunately for Churchill, it was just not possible for de Valera to accede to this request, even though this would result in the loss of British and Allied men and ships.

There is an interesting comparison to be drawn between British military belief in the need for facilities in Ireland in the early years of the Second World War and other countries' needs in more recent wars

Clark Air Base in the Philippines was of major importance to the USA in the Second World War, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. In the latter, it was the logistical hub for all military operations, and at the height of the war there were 60,000 military personnel based there.[6] However, improving technology in the shape of longer range aircraft reduced this importance, and when a volcanic eruption destroyed the base in 1991, it was decided that the cost of about one billion dollars could not be justified in rebuilding it. Instead, the Americans felt that their needs could be met at the nearby U.S. naval base at Subic Bay, which was still considered to be of the utmost importance. Unfortunately, the Philippines government would not agree to renew the lease of the base, which was due, so it too was evacuated, leaving no U.S. military there after ninety years.[7]

Advancing technology had rendered the air base less important, and an uncooperative government forced the military to find an alternative strategy – outcomes that at one time were inconceivable to the U.S. military. The analogy with the Treaty Ports is plain. Static, defended anchorages of the type that had served well for four hundred years throughout the empire had become an anachronism by the end of the war. Technological advances made fixed, heavy artillery, housed in solidly built forts, outdated. Aircraft, able to fly faster, for longer, and to carry heavier bombs were a more effective defence and they had

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[5] Winston Churchill, Hansard 5 (Commons), cccxxxv, cc.1099-1100.
[6] *New York Times*, 16 July 1991.
[7] *Washington Post*, 16 July 1991; *New York Times*, 16 July 1991.

the flexibility to move to wherever the need was greatest. The days of waiting for the enemy to approach had passed.

For the British government it was a particularly difficult problem to deal with because it came at a time when Britain's international influence was weakening, when nationalism was growing throughout the empire, and when Ireland's independence and confidence were finding new strengths.

There is little that is unusual about the history of the Irish Treaty Ports. It is just another instance of a major power which had extended its influence and interests beyond the confines of its own territorial limits seeking to defend those interests but having to do so at a time when days of empire were fast giving way to rising nationalism and aspirations of sovereignty were spreading widely.

Appendix

Extracts from Anglo-Irish Treaty, 6 December 1921

Articles 6, 7, and annex of Agreement for a Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland as signed in London, 6 December 1921, NAI reference: DE 2/304/1.

6. Until an arrangement has been made between the British and Irish Governments whereby the Irish Free State undertakes her own coastal defence, the defence by sea of Great Britain and Ireland shall be undertaken by His Majesty's Imperial Forces, but this shall not prevent the construction or maintenance by the Government of the Irish Free State of such vessels as are necessary for the protection of the Revenue or the Fisheries. The foregoing provisions of this article shall be reviewed at a conference of Representatives of the British and Irish governments, to be held at the expiration of five years from the date hereof with a view to the undertaking by Ireland of a share in her own coastal defence

7. The Government of the Irish Free State shall afford to His Majesty's Imperial Forces
(a) In the time of peace such harbour and other facilities as are indicated in the Annex hereto, or such other facilities as may from time to time be agreed between the British Government and the Government of the Irish Free State; and
(b) In time of war or of strained relations with a Foreign Power such harbour and other facilities as the British Government may require for the purposes of such defence as aforesaid.

ANNEX

1. The following are the specific facilities required:

Dockyard Port at Berehaven
(a) Admiralty property and rights to be retained as at the rate hereof. Harbour defences to remain in charge of British care and maintenance parties.

Queenstown
(b) Harbour defences to remain in charge of British care and maintenance parties. Certain mooring buoys to be retained for use of His Majesty's ships.

Belfast Lough
(c) Harbour defences to remain in charge of British care and maintenance parties.

Lough Swilly
(d) Harbour defences to remain in charge of British care and maintenance parties.

Aviation
(e) Facilities in the neighbourhood of the above Ports for coastal defence by air.

Oil Fuel Storage
(f) Haulbowline & Rathmullen: To be offered for sale to commercial companies under guarantee that purchasers shall maintain a certain minimum stock for Admiralty purposes.

2. A Convention shall be made between the British Government and the Government of the Irish Free State to give effect to the following conditions:

(a) That submarine cables shall not be landed or wireless stations for communications with places outside Ireland be established except by agreement with the British Government; that the existing cable landing rights and wireless concessions shall not be withdrawn except by agreement with the British Government; and that the British Government shall be entitled to land additional submarine cables or establish additional wireless stations for communication with places outside Ireland.

(b) That lighthouses, buoys, beacons, and any navigational marks or navigational aids shall be maintained by the Government of the Irish Free State as at the date hereof and shall not be removed or added to except by agreement with the British Government.

(c) That war signal stations shall be closed down and left in charge of care and maintenance parties, the Government of the Irish Free State being offered the option of taking them over and working them for commercial purposes subject to Admiralty inspection, and guaranteeing the upkeep of existing telegraphic communication therewith.

3. A Convention shall be made between the same Governments for the regulation of Civil Communication by Air.

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