

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 72

“England Is No Longer an Island”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

For all of the 19th century, the relationship between Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom has been a troubled one. The most zealous nationalists wanted full independence, but even moderate loyalists hoped to see the old Irish Parliament re-established.

Finally, after 26 years of elections and parliamentary debate, the United Kingdom is about to grant Irish Home Rule. Or is it?

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 72. England Is No Longer an Island.

We return to the United Kingdom today, but first I want to take a brief excursion to France to pick up on a thread from episode 48, when we were looking at the early development of the airplane. You’ll recall that the Americans Orville and Wilbur Wright built the first successful flying machine in 1903, then kept quiet about it and refused to demonstrate the machine for several years. Meanwhile, in France, a great deal of effort was being put into aeronautical research. There were organizations and journals and conferences created to share information, and there were multiple experimenters and research organizations in France, dedicated to flight.

It was all this aeronautical engineering infrastructure that had so many French convinced that the first successful heavier than air flight would be achieved in France, as had the first successful lighter than air flight, as we saw in episode 47. It came as quite a shock to the French to hear about the Wrights, and shock turned into skepticism when the Wrights refused to demonstrate their machine, or even so much as show a photograph of it in flight. Some in France were ready to call them frauds.

Meanwhile, experiments continued in France, and cash prizes were being offered to stimulate research. The first successful heavier than air flight in Europe was made by Alberto Santos-Dumont in 1906. You’ll recall that he had earlier won a similar prize for the first dirigible flight in Paris.

But Wilbur Wright brought a Wright Flyer to France in 1908 and demonstrated the machine in public. This laid to rest at last any doubts about the truth of the Wrights' claims.

And that's pretty much where we ended the story of flight back in episode 49. The French aeronautical establishment was gracious in its concession to the Wrights. Wilbur was feted by the Aero-Club in November 1908, and he delivered a speech in which he said, "If I had been born in your beautiful country and had grown up among you, I could not have expected a warmer welcome than has just been given me. When we did not know each other, we had no confidence in each other; today, when we are acquainted, it is otherwise: we believe in each other, and we are friends."

But the fact remained that it was a shock and a national embarrassment for the French that this aviation milestone had been achieved in the United States. The moment has been compared to the moment when the Soviet Union launched Sputnik into Earth orbit in 1957, sparking a similar sense of shock and embarrassment in the United States of that time.

And the analogy extends further. Like the US of 1957, France in 1908 responded to this surprise by redoubling its own efforts. France still had most of the experts and a better developed aviation infrastructure than any other country. The United States, by contrast, had the Wrights, but not much else. After their initial success, the Wrights focused on refining their existing design, but not in making fundamental improvements, and their machine would quickly become obsolete and they would fade into irrelevance. They would focus their energies not on new designs, but on patent litigation. In the US, where they were regarded as national heroes, the courts would look favorably on their patent claims, which would have the effect of blocking aviation innovation in America for many years to come. The Wrights *would* not innovate, and no one else was allowed to.

The situation was different in Europe. The Wrights mostly lost their patent claims in European courts, where they were not so highly regarded, and most especially in France. Ailerons—flaps on the back edges of the wings that could be raised or lowered—would supplant the Wrights' technique of wing warping to maneuver the airplane, and the Wrights did not hold the patent on ailerons.

The US military was taking some interest in airplanes—that's what Orville Wright was working on while Wilbur was in France—but the militaries in Europe were really sitting up and taking notice. Tensions in Europe are rising at this time. And everyone was making calculations about how many million soldiers this or that country could mobilize in this many days, or counting up dreadnoughts. The potential military applications of airplanes are pretty obvious, and across Europe, general staffs were getting that sinking feeling that this would soon be one more area where they'd have to worry about falling behind.

The French definitely had the edge, and the other major powers set to work to catch up. The United States would fall behind, though, because Americans weren't feeling the military pressure

in the same way the Europeans were. But in France and Russia in particular, and to a lesser extend in Britain, Germany, and Italy, militaries were placing higher priorities on aviation research.

Which brings us to the British newspaper magnate, born Alfred Harmsworth, later ennobled as Lord Northcliffe in 1904. Lord Northcliffe made a name for himself in what we now call tabloid journalism. He basically invented it in the 1890s, culminating in the founding of the *Daily Mail* in 1896. It was a decidedly middlebrow, mass market newspaper, which sold for half a penny at a time when most newspapers cost a penny, and it was an immediate success. The *Daily Mail* called itself “the busy man’s daily journal,” although the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, dismissed it as “written by office boys for office boys.”

But it collected a huge readership, and, in this time before the internet, before television, before radio, newspapers were the most important means of getting information, and a widely read newspaper carried plenty of clout.

Northcliffe was conservative and pro-Empire in his outlook, and his newspaper reflected that. It was one of the loudest voices in Britain warning of the threat posed by Germany, and advocated conscription for the British Army, at a time when Britain was the only major European power that did not have a draft.

So Northcliffe was being thoroughly consistent in calling for more aviation development in Britain, and to call attention to the issue, the *Daily Mail* began offering cash prizes for aviation milestones in the same way the Aero-Club had been doing in France. In 1908, the *Daily Mail* offered £500 for the first flight across the English Channel. Northcliffe conceived this prize as a way to make the point that in the twentieth century, the British people could no longer count on the English Channel and the Royal Navy to hold a hostile Continental power at bay.

Now, Wilbur Wright was showing off the latest Wright Flyer in France at this same time, and Northcliffe fully expected that Wilbur would make the flight and claim the prize money. But Wilbur didn’t. He never even made an attempt. This reluctance was probably due to the fact that his brother Orville had been seriously injured in a demonstration flight for the US Army at Fort Myer, Virginia in September. That flight ended in a crash when one of the propellers broke. Orville was hospitalized for seven weeks, while a US Army lieutenant, Thomas Selfridge, who was riding as a passenger, died of his injuries, becoming the first person in history to be killed in an airplane crash.

So it’s understandable if Wilbur, knowing Orville was still in the hospital back at home, was leery of attempting any ambitious stunts while he was in Europe, although it also seems a pity, as the Wright Flyer was perfectly capable of the flight, and it would have given the Wrights even more fame, and a few more lines in the history books. Northcliffe was disappointed too, and after there were no other takers in 1908, in 1909 he doubled the offer, to £1000, something close to a million US dollars in today’s world.

In the summer of that year, two French aviation experimenters would compete for the prize: Hubert Latham and Louis Blériot. Latham was born in France to a French mother and English father, who came from a wealthy family of bankers. He had already ridden a balloon across the English Channel when he saw Wilbur Wright demonstrate the Wright Flyer and took an interest in airplanes. He joined the Antoinette Company in France, a firm that manufactured high-quality internal combustion engines and was just beginning to look into building aircraft. Latham quickly became Antoinette's top pilot for their new line of airplanes, and by July was ready to take a crack at the *Daily Mail* prize.

Louis Blériot was a French electrical engineer of decidedly more humble origins. He developed the first practical headlight for automobiles and trucks, which had made him a lot of money, but Blériot too, had been bitten by the aviation bug, and plowed all of his profits from his headlight company into his new airplane company, with little to show for it by the summer of 1909. While Latham was in the competition for the honor, Blériot was in it for the money. He had sunk so much cash into aviation, the survival of his company might very well hinge on that prize money.

Their attempts got lots of publicity and support. The French Navy deployed two destroyers into the Pas de Calais to assist and potentially to rescue the participants. Several privately-owned British ships were also observing, and the Marconi Wireless Company placed transmitting stations on both shores to relay weather observations.

Latham made the first attempt, on July 19, in an aircraft dubbed the Antoinette IV. Things went well at first, but the engine failed about eight miles out to sea, forcing Latham to ditch the craft in the channel, which was another historic first, albeit not the one Latham was hoping for. One of the French destroyers picked him up and returned him to land, where he waited until the company delivered its newest plane, the Antoinette VII. It had never been tested, but it had good specs and was expected to succeed. But then Louis Blériot arrived with his own new plane, the Blériot XI, determined to take the prize for himself.

Bad weather prevented either pilot from making the attempt in the next few days. One might fantasize about how this could have turned into a real race, as in, let's launch both planes at the same time and see who gets to Britain first. But that's not how it worked out. Early in the morning of July 25, one of Blériot's team noticed a break in the weather and alerted him. They prepped the plane and took off at dawn, 4:41 AM.

Latham's team had all slept through the night and missed the opportunity. When they awoke and learned that Blériot had just taken off, they hurriedly prepped the Antoinette VII, but it was too late. Wind gusts had picked up, making takeoff impossible.

As for Louis Blériot, the wind blew him off course. He never did find those destroyers that had been placed in the Channel to guide his way. Blériot engines had a tendency to overheat and explode after about thirty minutes of operation, but fortunately for him, the windy, rainy weather worked in his favor here, keeping the engine cool.

The flight was smooth and steady, at an altitude of about 250 feet over the sea, and at a speed of about 40 miles per hour. As he approached the cliffs of Dover, the wind gusts blew up, buffeting him and pushing him farther off course. He reached British soil, but didn't know exactly where he was and he had not selected a landing site. He guessed, correctly, that he was too far east, so he turned left and followed the British coastline. Fortunately for him, Charles Fontaine, a reporter for the Paris newspaper *Le Matin*, had scouted out a meadow suitable for a landing, not far from Dover Castle. When he spotted Blériot's airplane, Fontaine began waving a large flag, the French Tricolor, of course. Blériot saw the signal and brought his plane to the ground. It was damaged in the landing, but Blériot himself was uninjured.

He won the prize, saved his company, and became a French national hero. The shame of being shown up by the Wrights was wiped away; French honor was satisfied. And in true noble Gallic form, a teary-eyed Latham sent Blériot a congratulatory telegram.

And Lord Northcliffe had made his point. The next morning's *Daily Mail* declared, "England is no longer an island."

[music: "La Marseillaise"]

We've spent two episodes (46 and 56) recounting the trials and tribulations of the Liberal government that was first elected in Britain in 1906. You'll recall their uneasy relationship with the new Labour party and the House of Lords' promiscuous use of its veto power to frustrate Liberal legislation.

Two general elections and the death of a King had followed in 1910. By 1911, the Asquith government was still in power, albeit without a majority and only with the support of Labour and the Irish Parliamentary Party. But the Liberals, with some assistance from the new King, George V, had succeeded in passing the Parliament Act of 1911, which took away the Lords' veto. The House of Lords can now reject a bill the first two times it passes the Commons, but the bill then takes effect on the third passage, with or without the Lords' assent. This effectively gives the Lords power to delay a bill for two years, but not to defeat it permanently.

And for all the struggles the Government has had to go through to get its policies enacted, the Liberals have managed a pretty good run of it. New laws creating unemployment insurance and old age pensions and guaranteeing the rights of labor unions are now on the books. Members of Parliament now get paid a salary, making it possible for members of the working class to serve. And the *Osborne* judgment, which barred trade unions from spending money for political purposes, was reversed by the Trade Union Act that Parliament would pass in 1913.

But two divisive questions remained to vex the Government, and would preoccupy Asquith and his cabinet until the outbreak of the Great War in 1914. One was Irish Home Rule, which I'll get back to in a moment, but first let's take a look at the other one: women's suffrage.

You'll recall from episode 56 that the suffragettes, the militant wing of the women's suffrage movement, has been protesting for women's right to vote, and by 1911, had been going so far as creating public disruptions and committing property damage in support of their cause.

The Prime Minister, Asquith, is personally opposed to women's suffrage and sincerely baffled by the passions it raises. Still, he would not put up a suffrage bill in the House of Commons, even though there were by now likely the votes to pass it.

Suffrage activists were being imprisoned, were going on hunger strikes, and were being force fed with feeding tubes. And I bet you thought this was the twentieth century. The treatment of suffragette prisoners became a major political debate. The ethics of forced feeding were hard to defend, and in particular, male doctors forcing tubes into the bodies of unwilling female prisoners raised deeply uncomfortable questions about gender relations. Released prisoners testified to being treated brutally, even sadistically, by male doctors. One prisoner reported hearing the doctor joke that "this is like stuffing a turkey for Christmas." Prisoners claimed to have suffered bruises and other injuries from the forced feedings, while the Home Office insisted that no harm was being done.

Suffragettes began protesting the forced feedings almost as vigorously as the denial of votes to women. They picketed the homes of prison doctors, and pointed out that of course it was much easier for the Government to brutalize women, since women had no recourse to vote against the Government, the way men do.

In 1910, suffragette activist Lady Constance Bulwer-Lytton was arrested in Liverpool after throwing rocks at an MP's car. She was from an aristocratic family—she was in fact the granddaughter of Edward Bulwer-Lytton, the first Baron Lytton, whom we met back in episode 21 and who is best known today as the author of that immortal opening line, "It was a dark and stormy night." But although she was blue blood through and through, Lady Constance gave a false name and identified herself as a working-class seamstress so as not to get any special treatment from the authorities. She was sentenced to two weeks in prison and force fed eight times during that period. After her release, she wrote extensively about the experience and gave lectures around the country. This first-hand testimony from someone of Lady Constance's social status was much harder for the government to dismiss, as was the fact that the 41-year old suffered a heart attack and a series of paralyzing strokes shortly after her release from prison, which was attributed to her poor treatment. She would never fully recover, and would pass away in 1923, at the age of 54.

In 1912, three British physicians, two men and a woman, would publish a detailed report of forced feeding in the prestigious medical journal, *The Lancet*. Not only did they lay out the many physical and psychological traumas inherent in forced feeding, but they would call out the government and the Home Secretary for deceiving the public by minimizing or understating the risks. They concluded, "We are confident that were the details of the statements we have read

and the cases we have examined fully known to the profession, this practice, which consists in fact of a severe physical and mental torture, could no longer be carried out in the prisons of the twentieth century.”

In 1913, Parliament addressed the problem of forced feeding legislatively. What did they do? Did they outlaw forced feeding? Ha, ha. Of course not. Did they grant women the right to vote? Are you kidding me? No, they passed the Temporary Discharge for Ill Health Act. Under this law, if a prisoner went on a hunger strike and became ill, the authorities can release her. The catch is, after she is released, and begins eating again, and regains her health, she can be arrested again and returned to prison to continue her sentence.

This was intended as a more merciful alternative to forced feeding, but the government quickly found that it created new problems. Suffragettes released from prison would be spirited away into hiding by their fellow suffragettes to avoid re-arrest. Or else police who came to re-arrest the prisoners would be confronted by a mob of suffragettes determined to interfere.

Worst of all, it struck many as simply exchanging one cruelty for another. Subjecting a prisoner to round after round of arrest, hunger strike, illness, release, recovery, re-arrest hardly seemed any more merciful or civilized. The act became known colloquially as the “Cat and Mouse Act,” because it struck many that the government was playing with the suffragette prisoners in the same way as a cat that has cornered a mouse.

[music: *Fantasia on the “Dargason”*]

Ireland has come up in the historical narrative of *The History of the Twentieth Century* quite a few times now, beginning all the way back in episode 10. Ireland is about to move to the fore, so let me take a minute here to do some review and fill in a few gaps.

I described Ireland earlier as England’s first colony. The story here really begins in 1155, less than a century after the Norman Conquest. The Norman King of England, Henry II, claimed that the Pope, Adrian IV, had granted Henry the right to take control of Ireland and govern it. Pope Adrian was the first and only English Pope, and it is claimed that he granted this power so that Henry could rein in the Irish Church and bring it back into conformity with Rome. Ireland had been Christianized some 600 years earlier, reputedly by St. Patrick, but as a distant and isolated land, it had traditionally had little communication with the Roman church and had become accustomed to doing things its own way. Pope Adrian was looking to put an end to all that.

Whether the Pope actually envisioned a full Norman invasion and occupation of Ireland, or indeed whether he actually made any kind of grant of authority to Henry at all is a question historians still debate. For our purposes, though, just take note of the fact that this is Henry’s justification for attempting to seize control of Ireland.

Such an invasion might have led to the full conquest of Ireland. Or it might have ended in a Norman defeat and withdrawal from the island. But what actually happened was something in between. The English King had direct control over only a small portion of the island around the city of Dublin, which came to be known as the Pale. Beyond the Pale, some Irish lords would grant fealty to the English King, either by choice or by force, while others opposed English rule, sometimes resorting to raids on the English and their allies. Some modern historians point to this unhappy situation, where Ireland is divided into communities loyal to or opposed to the King of England, as the root cause of the political and religious strife that will wrack the island for the next 900 years.

Ireland had its own parliament by 1297, with a House of Commons and a House of Lords. The King of England would also claim the title “Lord of Ireland” until 1542, when Henry VIII would press the Irish Parliament into naming him King of Ireland. This meant that Ireland and England were now in a personal union. In 1603, the King of Scotland inherited the throne of England, and afterward all three countries were in a personal union.

Ulster, the northernmost Irish province, was the region of the island most resistant to rule by the English King, and so disloyal Irish lords in Ulster had their lands and rights seized and handed over to British colonists, a project known as the Plantation of Ulster. Many of these colonists were Scottish Presbyterians, and they grew into a distinct community in Ulster.

In 1707, the Kingdoms of Scotland and England united to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain. Ireland remained apart, still in personal union with the United Kingdom, still with its own Parliament. But the Irish Parliament never had the same kind of powers the British Parliament had. For one thing, the British Parliament held supremacy over the Irish Parliament. That meant the Irish Parliament could pass legislation in Ireland only with the assent of the Parliament in Westminster. The Irish House of Lords was not the highest court of appeal in Ireland—that would be the House of Lords in Britain. And Ireland would not have its own Prime Minister or Cabinet. What we would call the executive branch of Irish government was appointed by the King and by officials in London. During much of this time, the only people in Ireland who could own land or vote in parliamentary elections were members of the Church of Ireland, which is the Anglican church in Ireland. So both Irish Catholics and Ulster Presbyterians were disenfranchised, and Ireland was never a co-equal of Great Britain, even during the years of personal union.

The Irish economy was agrarian, but agriculture in Ireland lagged behind Britain in terms of productivity, owing largely to the concentration of ownership of land in the hands of mostly absentee landowners, and the fact that this land was being worked by impoverished tenant farmers with few rights or economic opportunities.

Things were a bit better for the inhabitants of Ulster who were by custom permitted more rights than other Irish, so Ulster tended to be a bit more prosperous, and when industrialization came to

Ireland, it reached Ulster first. Despite this, there was much emigration of Ulsterfolk to America during this time, creating in America a community often known here as the Scots-Irish or the Ulster Scots. They would settle what was then the American frontier and play crucial roles in the French and Indian Wars and in the American Revolution. They remain a distinct community within the United States to this day.

The negative example of Ireland may have played a role in sparking revolution in America. Benjamin Franklin visited Ireland in 1771 and wrote, "The lower people in that unhappy country are in a most wretched situation, thro' the restraints on their trade and manufactures. Their houses are dirty hovels of mud and straw; their clothing rags, and their food little besides potatoes. Perhaps three fourths of the inhabitants are in this situation." Franklin returned to America convinced that he had seen America's future, should she remain under British rule.

But after the American Revolution, the British government, having learned its lesson, granted more power to the Irish Parliament and loosened trade restrictions on the island. But revolutionaries in Ireland also took their cues from the Americans and from the French, and, supported by France, rose up against British rule in 1798.

After that rebellion was put down, with much bloodshed, the British government faced a dilemma. In the modern, enlightened 19th century, it would no longer be defensible to bar the Catholic majority in Ireland from participating in the governance of their own country. But to fully enfranchise Catholics might easily lead to an Irish Parliament controlled by Irish Catholic voters severing its relationship with the British Crown and taking Ireland its own way.

The best solution seemed to be to bring Ireland into the United Kingdom. Acts were passed in both Parliaments, and on January 1, 1801, the first day of the 19th century, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland came into being, one unified kingdom of three countries, with the added bonus that the votes of the newly enfranchised Catholic voters in Ireland would be diluted by the much larger Protestant voting population in Great Britain.

Ireland suffered a great famine in the late 1840s, triggered by a potato blight and exacerbated by inept and counterproductive policies from the government in Westminster. More than half the population of Ireland either starved to death or emigrated, many to the United States, creating an Irish-American community there that would enthusiastically support anti-British Irish nationalism in their former homeland throughout the 19th century and into the twentieth. Another result of the famine was that the Irish language became a minority tongue in its own country, as English speakers, who were less likely to be among the ones starving or emigrating, became the majority.

That was pretty much rock bottom for Ireland. Happily, things were getting better by the late 19th century. Under pressure from Irish voters, and sympathetic Liberals in Britain, land reforms would grant tenant farmers more rights, the Church of Ireland would be disestablished, and something like universal male suffrage would be introduced in local elections. Parliamentary

elections still had property requirements at this time, however, meaning that a much smaller proportion of the poorer Irish population could vote, as compared to the wealthier British population.

Still, it was a start, and agriculture and industry in Ireland both expanded rapidly in the second half of the 19th century. So did nationalism. The staunchest Irish nationalists sought complete independence from Britain. More moderate nationalists sought a restored Irish Parliament, one empowered to enact legislation pertaining to Ireland on its own, but with national and international questions still in the purview of Westminster. This is what we have been referring to as “Home Rule.”

Home Rule as a concept closely resembles the devolution that created the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly by the end of the twentieth century, but a hundred years earlier, it was a unique and unprecedented idea.

Earlier in the 19th century, Irish voters were sending mostly Liberals and Conservatives to Westminster, just like the rest of the UK. But by the latter part of the century, virtually all of the Irish constituencies, apart from Dublin and Ulster, were sending members of the Irish Parliamentary Party, which stood for the proposition that Home Rule could be achieved through the parliamentary process. The Irish Parliamentary Party had wide support, although Ulster Protestants were suspicious of Home Rule, as it would create a majority Catholic parliament in Ireland. Protestants mockingly spoke of “Rome Rule.”

We have already seen how William Gladstone as Prime Minister with Irish Parliamentary support, attempted to pass Home Rule in 1886, falling some 30 votes short and creating a split in the Liberal Party. Liberal Unionists like Joseph Chamberlain went over to the Conservative side, and that was that. In 1893, following an election that restored the Liberal coalition to a majority, Gladstone tried again. You’ll recall that Irish Home Rule passed the House of Commons, only to be defeated decisively in the House of Lords. The Conservatives and their Liberal Unionist allies returned to power in 1895.

In 1906, Liberals won power in a landslide and took enough seats that they could govern without the support of the Irish Parliamentary Party, but as we have seen, they were frequently frustrated by an assertive House of Lords. Two general elections in 1910 reduced the number of Liberal seats to the point where the Liberals would once again need to go into coalition with the Irish Parliamentary Party, and 1911 saw the passage of the Parliament Act, eliminating the Lords’ veto.

Finally, at last, 26 years after the first Home Rule bill had been introduced into the House of Commons, Parliament seemed poised to enact Irish Home Rule. You can imagine how impatient Irish nationalists have become by now, after 26 years and seven general elections, with being told over and over to wait for the political process in Westminster to address their aspirations.

But that day has come at last, and in 1912, a third Home Rule bill was introduced by the Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith.

During the debate over the powers of the House of Lords, everyone knew that stripping the Lords of their veto would mean the enactment of a Home Rule bill soon after, and that was one of the reasons that debate had become so heated. In Britain, Conservatives and Unionists feared that Home Rule was the first step down the slippery slope to full Irish independence.

There was also strong opposition in Ulster. Protestants in particular were vehement in their opposition to rule from Dublin. Protestants formed the political and economic elite of Ulster, and Home Rule likely meant loss of their privileged position, possibly even religious discrimination at the hands of Catholics. Industrialists in Ulster and in Dublin feared that majority rule by a rural and agrarian Irish majority would mean their own economic interests would be neglected.

As early as 1911, Irish Unionists were declaring that rule by the German Kaiser would be preferable to rule by the nationalists. By the time the Home Rule bill had been introduced, the Ulster Volunteers had been formed, a militia force that declared a willingness to take up arms in opposition to any attempt to implement Home Rule.

Meanwhile, under the provisions of the new Parliament Act, the Lords still had the power to delay this legislation for two years, meaning that Home Rule could not become law until 1914 at the very earliest, and also meaning that the moderate nationalists who had waited 26 years for this moment are now being told to wait a couple years longer. During this two-year period while everyone was waiting for the other shoe to drop, the debate escalated to threats of violence. Unionists swore they were prepared to use force to resist Home Rule. Irish nationalists responded by organizing their own Irish Volunteers, and swore to use force in support of Home Rule or to oppose any partition of Ireland.

By 1914, as Parliament was moving toward passing the Home Rule bill for the third and final time, tensions were rising to the point that many feared civil war in Ireland. In March, intelligence reports were surfacing suggesting that the Ulster Volunteers might raid British armories for arms and ammunition. At the main British Army camp at Curragh, dozens of army officers, many of whom were Irish Protestants or had Irish Protestant friends and family, offered to resign their commissions rather than defend the armories.

This was an unusual and disturbing development in British politics, where the Army is normally apolitical. The Government tried to play down the matter, claiming it was all a misunderstanding. And indeed, it's not clear whether these officers believed they were being asked to go into combat against the Ulster Volunteers, or merely to reinforce the defense of the armories. But this was the same British Army that attacked striking workers with bayonet charges. It seemed the Army didn't mind going to war against its own citizens, but would they make an exception for Ulster?

The Government insisted it was prepared to enforce Home Rule with the Army if necessary and downplayed the incident, but it had an important effect. It emboldened the Ulster Volunteers, convincing them that the Army would not resist them, while engendering worries among Irish Home Rule supporters that if the Ulster Volunteers ever did use force against them, the British Army might simply stand aside.

The last hope for a compromise might be some form of partition of Ulster from the rest of Ireland. Then most of Ireland could have Home Rule, while Ulster would continue to be governed under the status quo. But the devil was in the details. How big or small would the Ulster partition be? And Ulster Protestants wanted permanent partition, while Irish nationalists were only willing to agree to a temporary, transitional partition.

In July 1914, King George convened a conference at Buckingham Palace, bringing together representatives of the Liberals, the Conservatives, the Irish Nationalists, and the Ulster Unionists in what appeared to be a last-ditch effort to resolve the outstanding disagreements peacefully. But the rising tensions in Ireland were soon to be overshadowed by the rising tensions in the Balkans.

We'll have to stop there for today. Thanks for listening. A couple of you have inquired about a Patreon page, so I'm working on that and I hope it will be up and running soon. This would give you a new and easier way to support the podcast and my other projects. I'm working on a suitable set of rewards for patrons; if you have any suggestions, you can leave them for me at the usual places: on the Facebook page, at historyofthetwentiethcentury.com, tweet them to me at History20th, or email them to me at historyofthetwentiethcentury@gmail.com. And thank you to listeners Rasmus, Martin, and Liam for contributing already.

I'm going to be appearing at Confluence, the annual science fiction convention at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the first weekend in August. I'll have more information on that closer to the conference, but if it sounds interesting to you, come on by, and if you do attend Confluence, be sure to look me up.

And I hope you'll join me next week on *The History of the Twentieth Century* as we take another look at the Balkans. We recently covered events there in 1912 and 1913. Now we will revisit that restless region once again and see if anything interesting is happening there in 1914. That's next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. In 1965, a British comedy film was released. It was inspired by Lord Northcliffe's real life 1909 offer of £1000 for the first flight across the English Channel. In the film version, the fictional Lord Rawnsley, owner of the fictional *Daily Post*, offers a £10,000 purse in 1910 to the winner of an air race from London to Paris, and flyers from Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United States compete for the prize. The film, directed by Ken Annakin and released through Twentieth Century Fox, was entitled *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines; Or, How I Flew from London to Paris in 25 Hours 11 Minutes*. It stars

the great Robert Morley as Lord Rawsley and comes with a theme song guaranteed to burrow its way deep into your ear.

The film is well worth watching, not least because the filmmakers built six working replicas of different period aircraft, including an Antoinette IV, plus additional non-functional models for scenes on the ground, so it gives you a good idea of what the airplanes of the period were like. It's striking how small some of them are; just barely large enough to carry a pilot. Mrs. History of the Twentieth Century remarked that some of them look like hang gliders with engines attached. Yeah, pretty much.

[music: Closing Theme]