

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 127

“A Terrible Beauty Is Born II”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

I repudiate the assertion of the prosecutor that I sought to aid and abet England's enemy. Germany is no more to me than England is. I asked and accepted German aid in the shape of arms and an expeditionary force. We neither asked for nor accepted German gold nor had any traffic with Germany but what I state. My aim was to win Irish freedom: we struck the first blow ourselves but should have been glad of an ally's aid.

I assume I am speaking to Englishmen, who value their freedom and who profess to be fighting for the freedom of Belgium and Serbia. Believe that we, too, love freedom and desire it. To us it is more desirable than anything in the world. If you strike us down now, we shall rise again and renew the fight. You cannot conquer Ireland. You cannot extinguish the Irish passion for freedom. If our deed has not been sufficient to win freedom, then our children will win it by a better deed.

Patrick Pearse, addressing his court martial.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 127. A Terrible Beauty Is Born, part two.

Last week, I began the story of the Easter Rising of 1916. Recall that the date chosen for the Rising was Easter, which fell on the unusually late date of April 23 that year. I got as far as early April last week, so today, let's pick up from there.

On Saturday, April 8, the mobilization orders for the Easter Rising were put out by Director of Organization Patrick Pearse. Pearse's cover story was that the mobilization was just a training exercise, and the orders went out through normal channels, and Chief-of-Staff MacNeill even signed off on them. The Volunteers had run a similar mobilization exercise last year on Easter,

so all this seemed routine and did not arouse suspicion. Pearse even went so far as to issue instructions for Irish Volunteer commanders to submit reports on their units' performance in the "exercise" by May 1.

The following day, Sunday, April 9, a German freighter named *Libau* left the German port of Lübeck, in the Baltic. The ship was disguised to resemble SS *Aud*, a real and similarly sized Norwegian freighter. This phony *Aud* carried 20,000 captured Russian rifles, ten machine guns, explosives, and a million rounds of ammunition. Her mission was to sail along the coasts of Sweden and Norway and then bear west and then south, playing the role of a neutral Norwegian freighter bound for the Mediterranean. Her course would naturally take her along the west coast of Ireland, and the plan was for her to bring her cargo ashore on the evening of Maundy Thursday, April 20, and deliver it to the Volunteers.

That same day, the German submarine *U-19* also left for Ireland. Aboard her were Roger Casement and two others. The submarine would deliver them to Ireland, also on April 20, where they would meet up with phony *Aud* and the Irish Volunteers. British Naval Intelligence had intercepted German wireless messages, Room 40 decoded them, and the Admiralty became aware that something was up.

The moderate Bulmer Hobson also got an inkling that something was up and on Palm Sunday, April 16, he gave a speech in which he did not call out the radicals in so many words, but spoke vague warnings about "precipitate action which could ruin the Volunteers." This language provoked murmuring in the auditorium and throughout Dublin over Holy Week. You could have told who was in on the plan and who wasn't by how they reacted to Hobson's words. People in the latter group were confused; a few welcomed his words as good and timely advice. Those in the former group, who knew what was up, were furious. Some of them thought Hobson had already fatally sabotaged the Rising.

On Holy Monday, April 17, British Naval Intelligence informed Sir Matthew Nathan that they had information that German arms were on their way to Ireland and that an uprising by the Volunteers was imminent. Unfortunately, the fact that Room 40 had broken all the German codes was one of the most closely guarded secrets of the war, and so they didn't feel they could tell Nathan *how* they knew, and Nathan was not convinced the Navy knew what it was talking about.

That very same evening, the seven top-ranking IRB conspirators met in secret and drew up their Proclamation of the Irish Republic. They also appointed themselves as the seven-member Provisional Government to rule over the infant Republic soon to be declared. Then they drew up a forged document, purportedly smuggled out of the British government offices at Dublin Castle, which claimed the British were planning a crackdown on the Irish Volunteers, in which they intended to seize the organization's weapons and property and arrest its leadership.

This forgery, which history knows as the "Castle Document," was made public on Spy Wednesday and created an uproar among the Volunteers and the Irish public in Dublin. Even

moderates like MacNeill reacted with anger and he put the Volunteers on alert. This was perfect cover for the seven conspirators to begin issuing their own mobilization orders to the most senior Volunteer commanders. The rank and file, like the moderate leaders, still mostly had no idea what was going on.

Spy Wednesday, by the way, the Wednesday before Easter, gets its name from a church tradition that identifies this day as the one on which Judas Iscariot made his offer to betray Jesus in exchange for thirty pieces of silver.

The mobilization order given was for Easter Sunday, April 23, and here we find the biggest organizational cock-up of the Rising. The plan had at first been for the Rising to start on Good Friday, April 21. But then it had dawned on the conspirators that a lot of the Volunteers worked for the British in some capacity, such as the Civil Service or the Post Office, and a Friday mobilization would require all these people to miss work, and surely Dublin Castle, who had already noticed that many of their staff were Volunteers, could not fail to notice an unusual number of no-shows on Friday morning, or that all the no-shows were also members of the Volunteers, or then to put two and two together and get “insurrection.” So they bumped the Rising two days, to Easter Sunday the 23rd at a pretty late date, just a few weeks before the event.

“Well, so what?” you may wonder. And fair enough, within the IRB and the Volunteers and their operations in Ireland, this change of date presents no great challenge. The conspirators have been remarkably successful at planning, organizing, and executing the Rising in secrecy. The British police in the past had managed time and again to infiltrate Irish extremist groups, collect intelligence, and foil their plans before they begin, but this time, the IRB have kept their secrets and left the British in the dark. That’s with regard to their operations in Ireland.

But their Achilles heel is the coordination with Berlin. Remember that German freighter and that German U-boat bound for Ireland? I said they were scheduled to reach Ireland the night of April 20, Maundy Thursday. The reason they were scheduled for Maundy Thursday evening was that they would arrive just in time for a Friday Rising. Timing this was tricky. If the weapons arrive too late, the Rising could be crushed in the meantime. But the bigger risk is an early arrival, which could tip off the British before the Rising gets going.

Now, the IRB and the German military have the means for communication, but it is a clumsy process. Messages were usually sent from the IRB in Dublin via trusted members by steamship to the United States, where they would be passed along to IRB sympathizers in America who were in contact with the German Embassy. The Embassy would then send the message by cable to Berlin. This process was slow and there were too many opportunities for the message to get garbled or confused. And since British Intelligence could read German cables anyway, all this caution was mostly for naught.

Also, in 1916, a perfectly synchronized military operation just isn’t possible. The Germans had warned the IRB that the arrival of the weapons might be any time from the 20th to the 23rd.

That's reasonable timing for a Rising on the 21st. But now that the Rising's been postponed for two days, the freighter and the sub needed to be postponed two days as well. Except that by the time the Germans got the message, both were already en route. Communicating with a submarine by radio was a dicey proposition, and communicating with the freighter was impossible, because it didn't have a radio on board.

In the early hours of Good Friday, April 21, the U-boat reached its rendezvous point. Aboard her was a very disgruntled Roger Casement, who has by this time become thoroughly disillusioned with the Germans. Casement had concluded that the Germans cared nothing for the Irish nation or people. Their only interest in the Rising was to distract the British and strengthen their own position in the war. The level of support they were providing was minimal, and they seemed not to care how much Irish blood was spilled or what the chances were of a successful revolt, so long as the fighting in Ireland won Germany some incremental gain in France. Or, as Casement himself put it, "Why did I ever trust in such a government...? [T]hey have so sense of honor... This is why they are hated by the world and why England will surely beat them."

Casement was in fact returning to Ireland with the intent of contacting the leaders of the Rising and urging them to call it off, on the grounds that it would surely fail without much more in the way of German support.

When the U-boat reached its rendezvous, it found...nothing. The Volunteers assumed the Germans had gotten the message about the delay and they weren't expecting either the freighter or the submarine to arrive this early, and so no one was waiting for them. The freighter, it turns out, was anchored just a few miles away, but no one aboard the sub knew that. Casement and his two companions were put on a boat and rowed to shore, and two of them, including Casement, would soon be in police custody.

As for the German freighter, it was quite lucky to get as far as it had, although its luck was soon to run out. Given that the Navy already knew the freighter was coming and had some smaller ships out searching for it, it's rather surprising it hasn't already been captured. Or, maybe it's not so surprising. Maybe the Navy is deliberately allowing the freighter to reach land in the hope that the police ashore could arrest anyone who turns up to meet it. Well, if that was the plan, it was pretty good thinking, except for the fact that no one showed up. The freighter waited until 1:00 PM Friday afternoon. Then her nervous captain weighed anchor and headed for the open ocean. Just a few hours later, the Navy caught her and forced her to Queenstown. On Saturday morning, the captain scuttled his vessel to avoid its seizure. It sank around 9:30 AM.

At about the same time on Saturday morning in Dublin, a Volunteer reached Eóin MacNeill and filled him in on the arrest of Casement and the capture of the freighter. It was the first MacNeill had heard about the U-boat or the freighter, or the impending rising, or the fact that the Castle Document was a forgery, and he was furious. He swore to "stop all this damned nonsense," as he put it. He sent out messengers across Ireland countermanding the orders for tomorrow's

mobilization and even issued a statement to be published in the *Sunday Independent*, Dublin's only newspaper that published on Sundays. It read:

Owing to the very critical position, all orders given to the Irish Volunteers for tomorrow, Easter Sunday, are hereby rescinded, and no parades, marches, or other movements of Irish Volunteers will take place. Each individual Volunteer will obey this order strictly in every particular.

On Sunday morning, MacDermott and the other radicals were as incensed by MacNeill's action as he had been by theirs. It appeared that a year and a half of planning had been undone by the stroke of a pen. A long-term postponement seemed out of the question. Everyone believed the British authorities would soon crack down on the Volunteers, so they met to consider whether there was a way to go through with the Rising in spite of this setback. Clarke wanted to go ahead with the Rising as planned, on Easter, on the theory that whatever orders the Volunteers had been given, they would soon join in once a rising actually began, but no one else agreed with him. It was decided instead to begin the Rising the following day, Easter Monday, at noon. This would give 24 hours to issue new orders.

There remained the problem of what to do about MacNeill. Arresting or even killing the nominal leader of the Volunteers was considered, but in the end, it was decided to deceive MacNeill one more time. The radicals put on a show of contrition, and MacNeill believed them.

Meanwhile, on Saturday evening, Undersecretary Nathan had met with the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Lord Wimborne, to discuss the situation. Nathan believed that Roger Casement, who was now in police custody, was the ringleader of the planned uprising and that his capture, and the successful interception of the German arms shipment meant that the rising had collapsed. Lord Wimborne wasn't so sure. He wanted the authorities to round up the leaders of the Volunteers at once. Nathan resisted this idea at first, but eventually agreed provided he could get the approval of the Chief Secretary in London. Nathan sent him a cable that Saturday evening. By the time Birrell replied with his approval on Monday, the Rising had already begun.

This was a serious missed opportunity for the British. If the police had begun rounding up the leaders of the Volunteers on Easter Sunday, it might very well have disrupted their last-ditch effort to get the Rising launched.

[music: *Lament*]

Monday morning, April 24, Easter Monday, the leaders of the Rising gathered a force of about 400 at Liberty Hall, in central Dublin, the headquarters of the local trade unions. From there, they proceeded to the General Post Office, arriving at noon. A crowd gathered, and passersby watched with a mix of astonishment, curiosity, and alarm as Patrick Pearse read out the Proclamation of the Irish Republic:

Irishmen and Irishwomen: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom...

In this supreme hour the Irish nation must, by its valour and discipline and by the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the august destiny to which it is called.

Afterward, copies of the Proclamation were pasted on the walls of the building for the public to read. Pearse and James Connolly entered the Post Office, which they had chosen to be the headquarters of the Rising. Inside, clerks and customers were busy with the usual post office business. They were cleared out, and Irish flags hoisted above the building.

At the same time, a small group of rebels approached the Magazine Fort, the location of a British ammunition stockpile. The sentries were distracted, overpowered, and the force entered the fort. The plan was to seize as many arms as possible and blow up the rest of the stockpile. The loud explosion would signal to all Dublin that the Rising was underway. It didn't work out so dramatically in practice. Only a small number of weapons were seized. The stockpile was blown up, but the explosion was far less loud than had been hoped. The son of the commander of the fort, a 22-year old civilian named George Alexander Playfair, was shot as he fled the fort in an attempt to raise the alarm. He died that night. Another force took control of Stephen's Green, a park in Dublin, and dug themselves trenches.

Yet another force took Dublin City Hall and then about a dozen attempted to take control of Dublin Castle, the location of the main British government offices in Ireland. At the gate, a lone policeman named James O'Brien tried to stop them and was shot and killed, probably the first fatality of the Rising. But the incident bought those inside enough time to close the iron gate before the rebels could get any farther, and unfortunately for the rebels, this half-hearted effort had lost them their best opportunity to dramatically seize the most important building in Dublin.

Still, the Rising had taken the British, not to mention most Irish, entirely by surprise. The rebels cut the telegraph lines in Dublin, although they were unable to cut off telephone service. Automobiles and trucks—excuse me, *motorcars* and *lorries*—were seized by the rebels and put to use in the service of the Rising.

The rebel strategy was to capture a few key buildings in central Dublin, spread out and occupy sniper locations nearby, then hunker down and hold their positions against the British counterattack, and now they set to work setting up their defenses.

For the first day of the Rising, their work met with little interference. The British military was caught unprepared, and so there was little actual combat on the first day. One unit of British cavalry advanced into central Dublin, was fired on by the rebels at the Post Office, and hastily withdrew. And that was about it. The authorities in London got news of the Rising by about 1:30,

but had no information as to its size or its scope. The military tended to view the Rising through the lens of the Great War, by which I mean they saw it as a German operation, meant to hobble the British war effort. Official statements during and immediately after the Rising were replete with references to Germany, which came off as tone deaf in Ireland, where the public, whatever their opinion of the Rising, had no difficulty understanding that it was entirely an Irish affair, and regarded the British attempts to blame it on the Germans as a slander. The British stuck to this line for so long that many Irish began to refer to the Rising sardonically as “The German Conspiracy.”

Three officers of the Dublin Metropolitan Police were killed on the first day. The police did not carry firearms and so they were ordered off the streets, which led to vandals breaking store windows which led to looting. At least one pub was raided by civilians who seized the premises, availed themselves of the stock, got into arguments, which became fights, which led to several hospitalizations, because, you know, Ireland.

By midnight Monday night, Britain no longer ruled Dublin. There was no mail. There were no communications outside the city. Milk deliveries had stopped and food in general ranged from difficult to impossible to find, depending on where you lived. And for the next week or so, the only people in Dublin who are going to be well fed will be British Army soldiers.

Tuesday was mostly quiet, but rumors flew. All of Ireland was rising in support of the new Republic! Thousands of reinforcements were on the way! The Pope had blessed the Rising! Thousands of soldiers from America were landing! No, no, they were from Germany!

In truth, the Rising was almost entirely confined to Dublin, and although new recruits were joining the rebels, the Irish Republican Army, as they were now calling themselves, only numbered a thousand or so at its peak, and they had little or no good information about what was going on outside of Dublin.

What was going on was that British troops were pouring into the city. By Tuesday, there were more than 4,000 British soldiers in the city, substantially outnumbering their enemy. But the British had no more information about the numbers of the rebels than the rebels had about the numbers of the British. Hence, the British were cautious, building up their forces and reinforcing the positions they already held. The rebels at this point could be forgiven for thinking the Rising is going pretty well.

But the British had not yet begun to fight. Tuesday night, martial law was declared, and on Wednesday, Major-General Sir John Grenfell Maxwell was placed in command of the military in Ireland, with plenary powers to put down the Rising and deal with the aftermath. He would execute both these responsibilities with a very heavy hand.

The first major British attack was on Wednesday, April 26, and it was on Liberty Hall, that bastion of socialism and trade unionism. The British believed, mistakenly, that Liberty Hall was

the headquarters of the Rising. Actually, the building was empty. On Wednesday, the Royal Navy gunboat *Helga* was brought up the Liffey River into Dublin to shell Liberty Hall with her 12-pound guns, in concert with two 18-pound artillery guns the Army had brought in.

It took the gunners some time to find their target. In the first hour, not a single shell hit the building. They all landed in the surrounding neighborhood, which was densely packed with tenement houses inhabited by poor, working class Dubliners. Many innocent civilians died, including women and children, and the property damage was terrible. Liberty Hall was eventually gutted, but this did no harm to the Rising, since they weren't using it.

Afterward, the British pressed toward the Post Office. Rebels in forward positions fell back against the intense bombardments, returning to the Post Office to report to their commanders, who were now getting their first real idea of what they were up against. Most of the infantry combat during the Rising was of this sort: British soldiers advancing through the streets against rebel snipers hidden in buildings and attempting to prevent their passage. Against the main rebel emplacements, the British would rely on their artillery.

Those artillery shells would trigger fires wherever they landed, creating a nightmarish situation for the Dublin Fire Brigade, which fought earnestly all week long to put them out, often putting themselves into the crossfire.

On Thursday morning, the smiling sun rose into a clear blue sky over a city full of misery. Milk and bread were unobtainable. The only food left in Dublin now was the kind found in cans and jars. If you didn't already have food in your home, you had the choice of going hungry or risking life and limb to go outside in search of something. Even those who were able to procure something to eat for their families often found their way back home cut off by military movements. Nights were dark because the rebels had shut off the city's gas lines and corpses accumulated, both of victims of the fighting and of Dubliners who had died naturally. There were no funeral services to be had, which posed serious health risks to the living.

Urban combat is an ugly business, and urban guerilla combat that much more so. The British wore uniforms, identifying themselves as the enemy to the rebels, but the rebels did not return the favor. Most of the British soldiers were recent recruits, not familiar with this kind of combat. Sniper fire would rain down upon them from some building and they would enter in pursuit of the enemy, only to find the enemy had disappeared. In this kind of environment, soldiers get angry and frustrated. They begin to suspect any civilian they find nearby of being the sniper. Soon they begin to treat every civilian as the enemy. We've seen this happen before in this podcast, in the Boer War, in the Philippines, during the Rape of Belgium. Now it had come to Dublin. By Thursday afternoon, virtually any civilian man, woman, or child found on the street was likely to draw fire from British troops.

In Westminster, in the House of Commons, the British Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, told the House that "steps have been taken to give full and accurate information to our friends abroad as

to the real significance of this most recent German campaign.” The Rising was still seen in London as a skirmish in the Great War. Imagine how this statement must have sounded to the civilians in Dublin who were getting shot at by the British Army.

By late Thursday, the Post Office, the headquarters of the Rising, was under heavy bombardment. Artillery explosions shook the building. Fires burned all around, and the rebels were as occupied with putting them out as with the fighting. The sandbags the rebels were sheltering behind grew so hot that when the fire hoses poured water on them, it boiled. James Connolly, one of the seven members of the self-proclaimed provisional government, had been shot in the ankle and lay on a mattress in the building, in too much pain to sleep. The rest of the rebel leadership, including Patrick Pearse, officially the provisional President of the Republic, found themselves with nothing to do but wait for the inevitable.

On Friday afternoon, General Maxwell arrived in Dublin. The Post Office and its surroundings were now the only significant rebel position remaining. Increasing numbers of British troops were taking up positions around it. The British now outnumbered the rebels by something like twenty to one. At midday Saturday, April 29, with the Post Office no more than a gutted ruin, Patrick Pearse gave the order to surrender.

[music: *Lament*]

About five hundred people were killed in Dublin during the Rising. Most of them were civilians, including about forty children, and most of the civilian deaths were caused by the British. Over two thousand people were wounded, again mostly civilians. Over a hundred thousand Dubliners were left homeless or unemployed or otherwise dependent on public aid as a result of the fighting. Property damage was estimated at about £2,500,000 pounds, a huge economic burden for a country as small and poor as Ireland.

Martial law was still in effect. Over three thousand people were arrested by the military, and the following Tuesday, May 2, the courts martial began. Almost two hundred trials were held, if you want to call them trials. Maxwell had created a system under which the courts martial were conducted in secret and the defendants were not permitted to offer a defense. Ninety were sentenced to death and fifteen executed by firing squad, including Pearse and Clarke and Connolly and the other signers of the Proclamation. Connolly had had to be executed while tied to a chair because he could not stand, owing to his wounded ankle.

The fact of the trials and the executions was not made public until May 11, after the first thirteen executions had already been carried out. The news provoked an uproar in Dublin, then across the British Isles, then in the United States, where the Senate passed a resolution calling for clemency. In Parliament, Irish nationalist John Dillon and Irish Parliamentary Party leader John Redmond called for an end to the executions. Dillon warned the House that “thousands of people...who ten days ago were bitterly opposed to the whole of the Sinn Féin movement and to the rebellion, are now becoming infuriated against the Government on account of these

executions...It is the first rebellion that ever took place in Ireland where you had the majority on your side...and now you are washing out our whole life work in a sea of blood.” Even Edward Carson, leader of the Ulster Unionists, told the House, “No true Irishman calls for vengeance.”

The rapid-fire trials and executions were intended to be done before public opinion could be mustered against them. The Rising was still officially a German plot, and its leaders could not be given any opportunity to contradict the Government position. Otherwise, the narrative of the German plot might have to give way to an airing of the inconvenient facts of Irish history. Still, the executions were stopped at fifteen. The sentences of the other 75 were commuted.

In the weeks afterward stories of British soldiers shooting or bayoneting unarmed and unresisting civilians came to light, but no action was taken. Maxwell again took the maximalist position, declaring that such events “are absolutely unavoidable in such a business as this” and that “[u]nder the circumstance the troops...behaved with the greatest restraint.”

I’ve spoken before about how in this era, war was still seen as something conducted by soldiers on a distant battlefield. Civilians going about their ordinary business were not expected to become casualties. All the more so when the civilians are in their own city, in their own neighborhoods, in their own homes, and the soldiers attacking them are fighting in the name of their own country. The death and devastation of Dublin shook the entire English-speaking world. The fighting in Dublin was not so fierce as on the Western Front, but the thought of machine guns and artillery in a crowded city was a shocking one. And not just any city, but one that sat right on Great Britain’s doorstep.

The Easter Rising of 1916 did to Britain’s reputation what the sinking of *Lusitania* or the Rape of Belgium did to Germany’s. It caused Britons and citizens of other nations alike to question the British Empire’s professed civilization and advancement, and made many wonder just how strong the Empire really was. It was supposed to be British moral authority as much as force of arms that held the Empire together. But if there was unrest in Dublin, and if British soldiers were prepared to put it down so harshly, what did that mean for Calcutta? Or Cairo?

We’ll have to stop there for today. Thank you for listening, and thank you, Liam, for becoming a patron of the podcast. If you enjoy listening to *The History of the Twentieth Century*, I invite to join with Liam and become a patron. Or you can make a one-time contribution by check or via PayPal. Visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com for more information. Finally, I’d like to thank listener Josh for providing transcripts for the first few episodes of the podcast. Someday I hope to get transcripts posted for all the early episodes, but I can’t promise that’s going to happen anytime soon. Too many other things to do.

Next weekend is the Labor Day holiday weekend in the United States, so there will be no new episode posted, but I hope you’ll join me in two weeks’ time, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we turn our attention to the nation of Portugal. We’ll get caught up on the situation in Portugal in the early twentieth century and examine Portugal’s involvement in the

Great War, which will also involve her colonial possessions in Africa, so I wouldn't be at all surprised if there's some more on the war in Africa in that episode. Find out in two weeks' time, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Roger Casement was not tried before a court martial, because he wasn't involved in the actual fighting during the Easter Rising. Instead, he was transported to England and put on trial for high treason. The facts of Casement's case were not in dispute, but there was a legal dispute over whether the Treason Act, which had been on the books since 1351, applied to actions taken on foreign soil, as in Casement's case. The question turned on whether or not the court should read a comma into the text of the Act, which was originally drafted in unpunctuated Norman French. The court ruled that the comma was appropriate, which meant that treason could indeed be committed on foreign soil, which meant that Roger Casement was convicted and sentenced to death. Casement himself would quip that he was going to be "hanged on a comma," a remark which has been much repeated ever since.

This would be the first time a person with a knighthood would be executed for high treason since...I'm not even sure. I think maybe the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 or something—that was over 300 years ago. If anyone knows otherwise, please let me know. Casement had renounced his knighthood while he was in Germany, but he was stripped of it anyway prior to his execution, just to be on the safe side.

There were a number of prominent people who appealed to the Government for clemency for Roger Casement, on account of his work in exposing the crimes committed in the Congo, people like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and George Bernard Shaw, not to mention the United States Senate, which also passed a resolution calling for clemency for Casement. But it is here that Roger Casement's diaries come into the story. I've been talking about these diaries ever since episode 20, and back then I warned you they would come back to haunt him, remember? Anyway, here we are. The British government distributed typewritten copies of the contents of his diaries privately to those supporting the calls for clemency, and his support...evaporated. Most of those appealing for mercy for Roger Casement went silent when confronted with evidence that he was gay.

One of those who did not go silent was Shaw, who warned the British government that few in Ireland knew anything about Casement's involvement in the Rising, but that executing him would be the surest way of raising his profile into that of an Irish national hero. Casement was executed by hanging on August 3, 1916, at the age of 51, and over time, Shaw's prediction would prove absolutely correct.

Casement's body was buried in the prison cemetery, though his remains would be repatriated to Ireland in 1965, and there he would receive a state funeral and be reinterred with full military honors at a cemetery in Dublin, alongside many other Irish national heroes.

Because many Irish nationalists historically have been religiously conservative Catholics, there had been great discomfort over the diaries and what they reveal about Casement's private life. For decades, it was taken as read among Irish patriots that the diaries were a British forgery, created to smear Casement's reputation and silence the calls for clemency. In our time, most historians accept them as genuine, although you will still find skeptics.

But at the end of the day, the question of the authenticity of the diaries is a side issue. Whether or not Roger Casement deserved clemency on account of his humanitarian work in the Congo is a separate question from his sexual orientation, and the one sheds no light on the other. That the British Government used accusations concerning Casement's sexuality as a justification for putting him to death is just as shocking to the conscience whether those accusations are true or invented.

[music: Closing War Theme]