

Hello, I'm Sam Amenn and this is the third episode of the Art of Asymmetrical Warfare and today we'll be the period between 1917 and 1918

[Intro song]

When discussing something as big as the Anglo-Irish War, I think it's easy to get overwhelmed by the complexity of the conflict. So, I've decided to split it into at least three episodes, haha.

This first episode, we're going to discuss the period between 1917 and 1918 because I think there are a number of developments that happen during this period that affect the shape and outcome of the Anglo-Irish War as well as the Irish Civil War.

The second episode will discuss the war itself and focus on how the IRA and Sinn Fein created a parallel government.

The third episode will continue discussing the war, this time focusing on the tactics used.

## Consequences of Easter Rising

### Frongoch-prison life and university of rebellion

Easter Rising ended with a rebellion crushed, its leaders executed, and its participants were rotting in jail. The prisoners were originally placed in Kilmainham Jail, where many of the 1916 leaders were executed, but they were then moved to prisons in England and Wales. England was in a hard spot, because they couldn't continue the executions but the mass arrests and imprisonments that follow Easter Rising hurt their cause more than it helped. Ireland has a long history of using prisons to network and recruiting and the IRA of the 1920s were no different. Townshend also argues that the prisons introduced the prisoners to a military life they had never known via guard duties, military routine, inspections, etc.

One of the most famous prisons was Frongoch, a cold, damp, rat infested prison that used to hold German prisoners before the Germans were moved to accommodate the Irish prisoners. About 1,800 Irish rebels were sent to Frongoch and they included men such as Michael Collins, Richard Mulcahy, Dick McKee, Tomas Mac Curtain, Terence MacSwiney, and Sean Hales-all prominent future IRA men.

When they weren't organizing Gaelic football games and continuing their language lessons, they were organizing mass prison protests to improve prison conditions. Collins quickly made himself the leader of the Irish prisoners within Frongoch, talking to wardens and prison officials, ensuring prisoner demands were met, and rebuilding the IRB. While Collins entered the prison a no-name rebel and left as a man who had established his name as a strong organizer and leader, who could be a bit of a bully, but took care of his people.

Collins wasn't the only one making a name for himself while in prison. Eamon DeValera, who already had a bit of fame from his actions during Easter Rising, further strengthened his

reputation while in Dartmoor, an English prison. He made his first impression by his reception of Eoin MacNeill when he was brought to Dartmoor. When MacNeill joined in on a day of the exercise DeValera called the prisoners in the yard to salute MacNeill, despite many prisoners feeling angry at MacNeill for his counter-order during the Rising.

However, he also clashed with MacNeill when the prisoners were trying to elect a commandant for the prisoners. DeValera argued that since he was the senior Volunteer officer, he should be the leader. MacNeill eventually gave in and DeValera became the prison's leader and protector of the men. He organized non-violent protests until prison conditions were improved and he was transferred to two other prisons: Maidstone and Lewes. It is said that his position with Dartmoor and his role during Easter Rising made De Valera one of the most famous survivors of 1916 following his release.

The British, sensing that tensions were still high in Ireland, so after endless petitioning from John Redmond and as an act of goodwill, they released the prisoners in December 1916 into the 1917s. They also tried to convince all political parties in Ireland to participate in the Irish Convention: a space for the nationalists and unionists could talk. Sinn Fein refused to participate while the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) were torn about its usefulness.

When the prisoners were released, they were greeted by cheering crowds-which was a 180 from how the crowds reacted when the survivors of 1916 were arrested. Even though the Rising failed and they had spent part of 1916 in jail, the rebellious spirit had been squashed at all. In fact, they were ready to continue the networking and planning they started in jail and lay the groundwork for the Anglo-Irish War.

## Irish Organizations

### Sinn Fein Elections and Thomas Ashe

It required a two-pronged effort: winning elections and rebuilding the Irish Volunteers/Irish Republican Brotherhood.

Many diffuse groups in Ireland that needs 1917-1918 to regroup and figure out how to work together-or fail

The English, once again, did a lot to help the revolutionary spirit in Ireland. By proclaiming Easter Rising as a "Sinn Fein" rebellion and arresting many Sinn Fein members who had nothing to do with the Rising, they made it clear Sinn Fein was the revolutionary party while the IPP was out of touch.

The Sinn Fein experimented by running, Count George Plunkett, the father of the Rising martyr, Joseph Plunkett, as well as Eamon DeValera, both to a resounding victory (De Valera won Redmond's seat in East Clare). Many of the Irishmen who fight in the Rising went out and campaigned for Sinn Fein candidates, one of the most famous (besides Collins) was Thomas Ashe.

Ashe was born to a family steeped in Gaelic culture, a proficient footballer and Gaelic speaker. He started off a teacher before being swept into the Gaelic League and, later, the IRB and the Irish Volunteers. He was held in Lewes Prison after Easter Rising, and like Collins, organized the men while in prison. When he was released, he was considered to be a rising revolutionary star. After Easter Rising, he became the new president of the IRB and went on a speaking tour of Ireland. He would campaign for like DeValera and Joe McGuinness and was arrested and charged with sedition in August 1917 in Ballinalee County, Longford. He would be held in Mountjoy Prison.

After he was arrested, Thomas Ashe denied he was a criminal, demanding that he be tried a political prisoner. He and the other prisoners broke the items in their jail cells in protest. The British refused to break. Given British stubbornness, Ashe and many others went on hunger strike on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 1917. The prison authorities began force feeding on September 23<sup>rd</sup>. He died on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1917 from complications from force feeding. Richard Mulcahy organized his funeral, turning into a massive Sinn Fein and IRB demonstration. After leading a small group of men into city hall to collect Ashe's casket and carry it to Glasnevin cemetery. A three-volley salute was fired followed by last post was sounded and where Collins would give the following speech: "There will be no oration. Nothing remains to be said, for the volley which has been fired is the only speech it is proper to make above the grave of a dead Fenian."

On October 26<sup>th</sup>, 1917 Sinn Fein would hold their first national convention. On the same day, the Irish Volunteers/IRB had its own convention.

During the Sinn Fein convention, Arthur Griffith was replaced by Eamon DeValera as president of Sinn Fein and Sinn Fein dedicated itself to Irish independence with the promise that after independence was achieved the Irish people could elect its own form of government

However, there was still tension between those who believed in passive non-violence and the militant Sixteeners. DeValera represented a more militant path, but the whole executive was split between those who fought in 1916 and those who thought 1916 was a waste. Griffith and Michael O'Flanagan were VPs, Darrell Figgis and Austin Stack were secretaries, William Cosgrave and Laurence Ginnel were treasurers. The poll for the standing committee was headed by Eoin MacNeill and Cathal Brugha (Brugha and Markievicz wanted to kick MacNeill out of Sinn Fein for his 'treachery'). Some people claim Sinn Fein was simply a repackaging of the IPP, which is only partially true. In 1917 and 1918, it was a bridge organized between parliamentary politics and militant politics of the 1920s, with its large young membership pushing it in a more militant direction.

## Cumann na mban

Sinn Fein was also breaking social conventions, even though Cumann na mBan was still an auxiliary unit, Sinn Fein would allow four ladies on the Sinn Fein Executive and would run two women in the 1918 election-Constance Markievicz and Winifred Carney, with Markievicz becoming the first women to win a seat in parliament. Many of its supporters and campaigners were also women. In fact, many men would complain in 1917 and later that the women were more radical than the men. Cumann na mBan fully embraced the 1916 Proclamation and even

had Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington deliver a message to President Wilson in 1918, asking him to recognize the Irish Republic. Cumann na mBan took the front line in the anti-recruitment campaign and the police boycott and the anti-conscription movement. Like the Volunteers, Cumann na mBan believed they were a military unit, although they never got arms for themselves and worked closely with Volunteer units and Sinn Fein clubs. Eventually the organized would be swallowed by both.

In response to Ireland's resistance to conscription, Lloyd George restricted the Irish administration. It would now be governed by three commissioners: Lord French, Lord Midleton, and Sir James Campbell. French immediately went to Dublin and created what he called Advanced General Headquarters in Dublin Castle. He believed he was being sent to Dublin as military governor and he was going to set up a quasi-military government in Ireland with a soldier at its head. He was prepared to use force to break Ireland.

### Irish Volunteers and IRB

While Sinn Fein was slowly rebuilding itself, the Irish Volunteers were also being resurrected from the ashes. It started with local initiatives led by men like Ernest Blythe, Eoin O'Duffy, and Sean Treacy. Units would pop up in local communities, organized and armed by their local leaders and eventually making contact with GHQ which consisted of men like Collins, Mulcahy, and Brugha. While local units were rebuilding themselves, Collins was using the IRB to form a strict corps of officers, a growing source of personal power as well as military power the men like Brugha and De Valera (who were IRB during Easter Rising, but renounced their membership after the rising failed) distrusted.

GHQ issued an order saying that units should only listen to orders coming from their own executive (in order to prevent the order-counter-order disaster that possibly doomed Easter Rising) and swore the Volunteers would only be ordered into the field if commanders were confident of victory. No forlorn battles. Mulcahy, as Chief of Staff, worked hard to instill a military spirit and discipline into the Volunteers while understanding that their most effective unit at the moment was the company and local initiative. (The companies would expand into battalions and brigades as the war progressed, but the fighting and tactics would remain local and territorial) So, while trying to act like a regular army and expecting the Volunteers to respect their officers and GHQ, he also had to allow for local improvisation as well as trust the local executives to have control over their soldiers. It was a difficult balancing act he would struggle to maintain during the entire Anglo-Irish War and into the Irish Civil War and the formation of the Free Irish State.

Both historians Ferriter and O Caoimh have credited Mulcahy with being instrumental to rebuilding the Irish Volunteers/IRB. While riding around Ireland, fundraising for the Gaelic League in Cork and Kerry, he was also reorganizing the Irish Volunteers and took part in forming a Supreme Council and organizing a Volunteer convention in October. Meanwhile, men like Paddy Brennan, argued that Volunteer units needed to hold drill parades and when arrested and charged, refuse to recognize the courts or Britain's authority to try them. When sentenced, they would go on hunger strike.

The nationalists-no matter what group or identity they used-were succeeding because their foundation was on a separatist platform that was so wide and vague anyone could understand it and proclaim it while also allowing Sinn Fein to tap into the very real anger that was the outcome of World War I and conscription in a way other parties could not. What this did though was turned Ireland and the nationalist cause into an abstract which would become a problem during the Irish Civil War.

The Irish Volunteers convention elected DeValera as president, Brugha as the chairman of the executive with Collins as director of organization and Mulcahy as director of training, Liam Lynch as Director of Communications, Staines, Director of Supply and Treasurer, O'Connor director of engineering.

Both organizations were recovering quickly from the Rising and then the British gave the IRA the greatest gift in the world: the 1918 conscription crisis.

## Lightning Rod Issues

### Food Shortage 1917-1918

Before conscription was the food shortages in the winter of 1917-1918. The shortage was created because of food being exported to Britain, invoking memories of the terrible famine. Sinn Fein could not stop all of the food being exported, but they did what they could to protest this new version of starvation. For example, a member of Sinn Fein, Diarmuid Lynch took thirty pigs meant to for exportation, killed them, and shared the food with hard hit families, earning him deportation to America, but becoming a local folk hero and increasing Sinn Fein's prestige.

There were also agrarian tensions because grazers (those who used farmland for their cows to graze instead of growing crops) were given preference to available land so the Congested Districts Board could maximize profits. While this makes sense, it added to the great unease in the land, especially as the food shortage grew more acute.

The IPP grew out of the Land Wars of 1880s and Sinn Fein, ever aware of Irish history, decided it would be no different. It joined in the fight for land, arguing that all the ranch land should be broken up evenly. All over the country, Sinn Fein created commission to break up the land and figure out the pricing as well as organizing mass occupation of available land, but ranchers refused to acknowledge the prices Sinn Fein proposed.

The Irish Volunteers officially stayed out of the new land war, claiming it wasn't military or political in nature, but local groups sometimes participated. This combined with Sinn Fein's own land seizures could lead to painful confrontations with police and other anger Irish men, so it was a difficult job balancing non-violent and not starting a mass uprising.

Another tool, the Sinn Fein used, was boycotting. Said to original in Ireland during the Land Wars and used to great affect by Charles Parnell, Sinn Fein boycotted the RIC. This was a serious threat to the British system, decreasing the pool of candidates it could recruit from for the

RIC and training the people to fear the RIC as others, the first step to making a population comfortable with violent action.

Boycotting the RIC was an old idea, some members of Sinn Fein and the Irish Volunteers wanting to implement it as soon as they were released from prison. This became a strong tool of the Volunteers to ostracize those who were betraying the rebel cause by working for the British as well as prepare the citizens for a war mentality.

### Conscription crisis

No one yet knew that World War I would be over by November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1918. British thought she was facing long years of further bitter sacrifices and they needed new blood. They looked at Ireland and its large set of unruly young men itching for a fight and introduced the Military Service bill, extending forced conscription to Ireland-giving the Volunteers a shot in the arm while also uniting the Irish political parties, for the first time ever.

The Sinn Fein, IPP, and the Catholic Church pledged to resist Britain's efforts to conscript Irishmen. DeValera prepared a statement, meant for Woodrow Wilson, insisting that their resistance was a battle for self-determination and principles of civil liberty, similar to the American's cause during America's revolution. The Volunteers planned local actions as well, using the conscription crisis as a springboard for intensive recruiting and introducing the idea of militant resistance into the greater Irish consciousness. The boycott of the RIC increased tenfold during the anti-conscription movement, shocking the police and trapping them in their barracks in locations such as North Tipperary. Women were particularly effective implementers of the boycott with priests join in as well. Eventually the boycott was expanded to include those who helped or associated with the police. The boycott didn't force many police to resign, but it built a belligerent and hateful mindset against the police-allowing for later violence.

Also, in 1917 is the first time the tricolor flag is seen all over Ireland. Kevin O'Shiel would describe it as the flag of 1848 Republicans. The real power of the flag was that it was a sovereign flag of a sovereign nation and people, independent of the British. It became almost a fun game for the Irish-trying to flag *their* flags in ways that would prevent the RIC from destroying it permanently, often outwitting the RIC while also flying a flag that stood for an Irish Republic and their own people.

The Irish Volunteers were not as engaged with the conscription crisis as Sinn Fein, because they still didn't have a doctrinal strategy in place. Instead, volunteers were told to avoid getting arrested and if the RIC tried to arrest them, to resist. The Volunteers held daily drills and parades and prepared for battle, should the order ever arrive. However, GHQ seemed more concerned with getting rifles and ammunition than ordering a massive uprising. Conscription allowed them to demand that the local area their units controlled give up their guns to the Irish Volunteers. Some Volunteers even bought rifles off RIC or local British soldiers. Lack of guns would be a problem that plague the IRA through their war with the British. Conscription also saw a spike in people joining the Irish Volunteers. GHQ tried to manage this wave of volunteers by issuing orders regarding how men should be recruits and how they should be vouched for and accepted.

The Irish Volunteers allowed their own soldiers to elect their officers (how could this go wrong?) GHQ seemed to try and curb who could be elected like requiring that they be member of the IRB, but given the haphazard nature these units were created, but it was only somewhat successful, some units merging the Volunteers and IRB men seamlessly, while other companies were dominated by non-IRB men or vice versa.

They threatened mass slaughter should Britain try to enforce conscription and, apparently, there was a plan for Cathal Brugha to lead a group of men to assassinate the British cabinet (relying on Collins and Mulcahy—who was now chief of staff) to recruit for this venture).

Then John Redmond died on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1918, and he was replaced by John Dillon, crippling IPP just as Sinn Fein was rising in power. Sinn Fein won the 1918 election overwhelmingly with roughly 48% of the vote, effectively ending the IPP as a political party.

Initially, the Irish Volunteers were told to stay out of politics, but as Sinn Fein rose in popularity, the orders changed and many members of the Volunteers also ran for political positions, blurring that line between politics and violent rebellion. Additionally, non-violent Sinn Feinners were becoming increasingly radicalized because of clashes with the Royal Irish Constables (RIC).

Sinn Fein won 73 out of Ireland's 105 seats in Parliament, but there was election rigging and voter intimidation, so it's hard to judge the true amount of support in Ireland.

### German Plot

Instead, the British back down on conscription in mid-May while also arresting 73 nationalist leaders from May 17-18 under the Defense of the Realm Act, including Eamon DeValera, Constance Markievicz, Arthur Griffith, and William Cosgrave. They claimed there was a German plot i.e. Sinn Fein was working with Germany-like the 1916 rebels did and the 1798 rebels with the French.

It quickly became clear how flimsy the excuse was, that there was scant information, and undermined the government's credibility in Ireland. It successfully knocked Sinn Fein off its feet for a moment, especially since all nine of the twenty-one members of Sinn Fein's Standing Committee were arrested, but the British failed to arrest some of the most dangerous rebels such as Collins, Brugha, Mulcahy, and Harry Boland. But in the long run, it boosted Sinn Fein's cause and destroyed any chance IPP had in reclaiming the national narrative. As Constance Markievicz claimed, sending you to jail is like pulling out all the loud stops on all the speeches you ever made...our arrests carry so much further than speeches."

So instead of crushing Sinn Fein, the British increased their profile and national support. How could they blunder so severely? Well, it seems they misread the situation completely, believing that Sinn Fein was a fringe group and if they cut off its head, it would disappear. They had no idea that this was a grouping, well-networked movement.

## 1918 Election

Sinn Fein had won a total of five elections between 1917 and 1918 (De Valera, Count Plunkett, Cosgrave, Patrick MacCartan, and Griffith) and lost two elections. In 1918 was their first general election. The election was held on December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1918 and is considered one of the most important moments in modern Ireland's history. It was the first election after the end of the First World War and, because of the Representation of the People Act, women over the age of 30 and working-class men over the age of 21 could vote, tripling the Irish electorate from 700,000 in 1910 to 1.93 million in 1918

The IPP would win only 6 seats, the Unionists took 26 seats, and Sinn Fein won 73 seats.

The Sinn Fein victory can be explained in three different ways:

1. The new electoral: women and working-class men: people who had been hardest hit by the war and the rising and the conscription crisis, as well as the good shortage in 1917.
  - a. Not only was Sinn Fein and Irish Volunteers campaigning, but Cumann na mBan campaigned hard as well, possibly driving people into the arms of Sinn Fein since Sinn Fein stood for a republic which was against everything as it was.
    - i. Labor was also broken after the loss of Connolly and infighting.
  - b. The clergy was on Sinn Fein's side because of conscription. DeValera also went a long way to argue that anti-conscription was not anti-soldiers nor were they ignoring the sacrifice of the Irishmen who had fought in the war so far. But the crime was that Britain sacrificed the best Ireland had for a colonial war.
  - c. Curated candidates-Harry Boland was a strike 'chief broker in the allocation of seats. Sinn Fein ran those it was confident would win and in seats that would not weaken its own position or risk schism with the Labor movement. Also, there was some election rigging and voter intimidation.

Instead of sitting in parliament, the Sinn Fein candidates would sit in a new parliament: the first Dail of Eireann, which we talk about in the next episode.

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