



ÉIRE

Irish Republican Brotherhood

IRB and Óglaigh na hÉireann

The Irish Volunteers (Óglaigh na hÉireann) was formed as a direct result of the establishment of the Ulster Volunteer Force in 1912. According to several sources, the initiative for a series of meetings leading up to the public inauguration of the Irish Volunteers, came from the IRB. The IRB knew that the formation of any Force in reaction to the establishment of the UVF, would be quelled considering the IRB's reputation for promoting Irish independence by force. Therefore, they needed to operate, not outwardly within the IV, but silently in the background by attempting to control the IV from within. This was the reasoning behind promoting Eoin MacNeill as the public face of the IV, in order to promote a certain image to the public and the "powers that be" considering that MacNeill was a UCD lecturer.

Although the IV wasn't formally established until November, 1913, preparations began as early as January, 1913. Indeed, Michael Collins himself stated that the formation of the Irish Volunteers was not merely a "knee-jerk reaction" to the formation of the UVF, but essentially was "*old Irish Republican Brotherhood in fuller force.*"

There are several references to IRB control and pivotal involvement in the establishment of the Volunteers:

"I returned to Dublin early in 1913 for the purpose of assisting at the founding of the Volunteers. The I.R.B. already had a number of drill masters and when the Volunteers were ultimately launched, these men were capable of immediately taking up the starting of drill without any further meetings of an organising nature."

- George Lyons IRB

According to Diarmuid Lynch, in his witness statement, *"I do...recollect informal talks with Tom Clarke...and was aware that the "Executive" (of the SC) was quietly suggesting and directing (to the Irish Volunteer Executive) various developments from, the I.R.B. standpoint."*

"The IRB infiltrated and ultimately controlled the much larger and open Irish Volunteers." - Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, p.309.

Bulmer Hobson played a pivotal role in establishing and securing IRB control within the IV. Soon after, the IRB, through James Stritch, an IRB man and member of the Irish National Foresters, built a training hall at the back of 41 Parnell Square.

"In preparation for the formation of the Irish Volunteers in October 1913, arrangements were made about July of that year by the Dublin Centres Board of the I.R.B., which was presided over by me, for the military drilling of its own members in order to be ready to take over the military control of the new body. Drilling took place chiefly in the house of the Irish National Foresters, 41 Parnell Square, Dublin, where Pádraig Ó Riain's father was caretaker. Members of the Fianna circle of the I.R.B. who were themselves highly trained, acted as instructors. These included Michael Lonergan, Pádraig Ó Riain, Con Colbert and probably Eamon Martin." - Bulmer Hobson (IRB)

Furthermore:

"Hobson was not alone Centre of the Circle; he was also Secretary of the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Volunteer Executive, which was, in effect, the outward show of the I.R.B. Consequently, Hobson was in a key position. All the instructions, which went out would go out over his name and in that way he became unusually influential." - Mortimer O'Connell, Member of Teeling Circle, I.R.B., Dublin, 1913 - Member 'F' Coy. 1st Batt'n. Dublin Brigade, Irish Volunteers, 1914 - Clerk to Dail Éireann at date of statement.

Hobson and The O'Rahilly persuaded MacNeill to write an article for An Caidheamh Soluis which called for the establishment of the IV... again, the IRB (Hobson) working in the background in a non-public fashion. On the 11th of November 1913, Wynn's Hotel, a meeting was held where it is decided to formally establish The Irish Volunteers. Present at the meeting were Eamonn Ceannt, Seán MacDiarmada, IRB men, alongside Patrick Pearse and Eoin MacNeill. On the 25th November 1913 at

the Rotunda Rink, a meeting was called to enlist Irish Volunteers. The IRB organised this meeting (*Tim Pat Coogan*). MacNeill and Pearse were 2 of the speakers at the event with IRB men refraining from speaking in order to protect their involvement in the establishment of the Volunteers. Hobson was present but did not speak at the event because in his own words he was considered a “radical nationalist”.

The first Provisional Committee of the IV was made up of approximately 50% IRB men including, Piaras Béaslaí, Eamonn Ceannt, Bulmer Hobson, Michael Lonergan, Peadar Macken, Seán MacDiarmada, Liam Mellows, Séamus O’Connor, Colm O’Loughlin, Robert Page, Con Colbert, Eamon Martin and Patrick O’Riain. Patrick Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh and Joseph Plunkett were also members and were later sworn into the IRB.

By mid-1914, their ranks had swelled to 180,000. John Redmond was one of the most popular men in the country at the time because of his role in The Home Rule movement. The Irish Parliamentary Party were mostly opposed to the Irish Volunteers even though several of their members had joined the IV. Redmond however knew that the IPP would need to control the IV so that they would not be a threat to IPP authority. On the 9th of June, 1914, Redmond issued an ultimatum through the press that 25 IPP nominees be co-opted onto the Provisional Committee. The IRB completely opposed this. On the 16th of June, 1914, the 25 nominees made by John Redmond were accepted to the Provisional Committee by a vote of 18 to 9, the IRB making up the majority of the dissenters. Hobson reluctantly accepted Redmond’s demand for fear that Redmond would set up an alternative group, taking most of the Volunteers with him. Hobson’s support led to a falling out with IRB leaders, particularly Tom Clarke. The Executive of the Volunteers now fell into the hands of Redmond’s nominees. Despite their numbers the IPP failed to exert control over the IV with its original officers still in place: MacNeill (chairman), The O’Rahilly (finance), and his assistant, Eamonn Ceannt (*Tierney, Michael, Eoin MacNeill, 1980, p. 141*)

As a result of Redmond’s support and encouragement for Irish Volunteers to fight for the British army in World War 1, there was a split in The Volunteers whereby 11,000 – 13,500 approx. who were strongly opposed to fighting for Britain, retained the name of the Irish Volunteers, with the large remaining faction of approximately

175,000 leaving and taking the name, The National Volunteers. According to the witness statement of Frank Booth (IRB, Belfast), *"after the split the I.R.B. more or less took control, as all officers in the Volunteers were approached to join the I.R.B. and most of them did join the organisation."*

After the split, The IV ratified a Constitution on the 25th of October, 1914. They established a HQ staff consisting of MacNeill as chief of staff, The O'Rahilly as director of arms, Thomas MacDonagh as director of training, Patrick Pearse as director of military organisation, Bulmer Hobson as quartermaster, and Joseph Plunkett as director of military operations. The following year they were joined by Éamonn Ceannt as director of communications and J.J. O'Connell as chief of inspection (*Michael Tierney, Eoin MacNeill Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 171-172*) This reorganisation put the IRB in a much stronger position as IRB men, and soon to be IRB men, now held key military positions. The National Volunteers numbers fell rapidly and by 1917, most of their few remaining members re-joined the IV.

It is worth pointing out that, according to the Irish Defence Forces' (Óglaigh na hÉireann) own website, from then on *"The Irish Republican Brotherhood...effectively took over control of the Irish Volunteers."*

The Irish Republican Brotherhood propose to reconstitute Óglaigh na hÉireann in order to safeguard its role in the protection of the Sovereign Republic of Éire and the People of Ireland.

: James - Patrick :

IRB SC Member

: Niall - Martin :

IRB SC Member

John - D. Fitzgerald

IRB Chairman



J.F.



J.F.

J.F.