

The Royal Navy and the Curragh Incident¹

IN MARCH 1914, at the height of the Curragh crisis, Major Tom Bridges returned home from a tour of duty as British military attaché at Brussels and received the 'customary interview' with the king. 'The Curragh incidents', recalled Bridges, 'monopolized the conversation, and the King, walking up and down the room, dwelt on them at some length. He spoke strongly on the subject of maintaining discipline and said such a thing could never have happened in the Navy'. But the king was perhaps a little overconfident regarding the senior service, since many naval officers felt just as strongly as their army colleagues, although none actually ventured as far as Brigadier-General Hubert Gough and his fellow officers of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade at the Curragh camp near Dublin who threatened to resign their commissions rather than participate in the apparently-planned military coercion of Ulster into accepting Home Rule.²

From the start the navy played a central role in the crisis. The naval movements implemented by Winston Churchill, first lord of the admiralty, were not only an integral part of the government's response to the Ulster problem, but might well have resulted in the landing of seamen in aid of the civil power alongside the army. Moreover, after the immediate military situation had been resolved, the Royal Navy continued actively to be involved in the attempt to prevent gun-running into Ireland. It is the purpose of this article to consider the response of the navy to its actual and perceived role during the crisis in Ulster in the spring of 1914.

The most recent historian of Churchill's political role in the affairs of Ulster has emphasized the first lord's concern to find a compromise solution to the problems posed by the assimilation of Ulster's Protestants within Irish Home Rule. Accordingly, it was the rejection by the Unionist opposition of David Lloyd George's proposals to exclude Ulster from the provisions of Home Rule legislation on 9 March 1914 that induced Churchill to judge that the government must now press ahead with its Irish policy.³ Two days later the cabinet received new police reports from Ireland on the growth in the manpower and weaponry of the Ulster Volunteer Force (U.V.F.) and, amid largely unsubstantiated rumours of an

¹ Quotation from documents in the Royal Archives appears by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen. The authors gratefully acknowledge the generosity of the following in enabling them to consult archives in their possession and to quote from material in which they hold the copyright: The Earl Bathurst, Lord Esher, The Lord Keyes, Lord Mottistone, Lady Patricia Kingsbury, Sir Charles Fergusson Bt., Sir Hector Monro M.P., Mrs. Denise Boyes, Mrs. Diana Pym, Mrs. J. Clay, Mrs. D. D. Crichon, Mark Bonham-Carter Esq., Commander H. G. D. de Chair and the late Vice-Admiral H. T. Baillie-Grohman, as well as those archive repositories indicated below. The authors would also like to acknowledge the encouragement and advice of Dr. A. T. Q. Stewart of The Queen's University, Belfast, and Professor Bryan Ranft.

² Sir Tom Bridges, *Alarms and Excursions: Reminiscences of a Soldier* (1938), p. 65. The true extent of army disaffection is the theme of *The Army and the Curragh Incident, 1914*, ed. I. F. W. Beckett (Army Records Soc., ii, 1986).

³ P. Jalland, *The Liberals and Ireland: the Ulster Question in British Politics to 1914* (Brighton, 1980), p. 218.

imminent U.V.F. raid on arms depots in Ulster,⁴ established a sub-committee to handle the crisis. On 14 March Churchill added to the prevailing tensions with an inflammatory speech at Bradford on the need to push forward with Home Rule.

Earlier the same day the cabinet sub-committee—which was dominated by Churchill—authorized measures to guard arms depots in Ulster. Although in later weeks much was made of these orders by the Unionists, none of the participants ever recorded them as other than simply precautionary. There is, however, little doubt that larger-scale military movements were discussed when the general-officer-commanding (G.O.C.) in Ireland, Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Paget, came to London for consultations on 18 and 19 March.⁵ Yet there appears to have been genuine concern that even limited military movements might provoke a severe reaction from the U.V.F. or, conceivably, from the Irish nationalists.⁶

From the beginning, the discussions envisaged that naval vessels would assist in the precautionary movements by providing transport for troops to the north of Ireland in case the Great Northern Railway (Ireland) might prove uncooperative. On 19 March two 'scouts' in Irish waters, H.M.S. *Pathfinder* and H.M.S. *Attentive*, were told off to take a company of the 1st Bedfordshire Regiment to Carrickfergus and two cruisers of the training squadron at Queenstown (now Cobh), H.M.S. *Royal Arthur* and H.M.S. *Gibraltar*, were directed to carry 550 infantry from Kingstown (now Dun Laoghaire) near Dublin to Dundalk. In addition, a vessel from the 1st Destroyer Flotilla, H.M.S. *Firedrake*, was to be made available to Paget, primarily in case normal communications between Dublin and London became disrupted. All movements were to be completed by Saturday 21 March.⁷

These naval deployments were relatively minor compared with orders issued to the 3rd Battle Squadron and part of the 4th Destroyer Flotilla.⁸ The Battle Squadron was instructed to move from Arosa Bay, south of Cape Finisterre in Spain, to Lamlash in the Firth of Clyde. Asquith seems to have misled the house of commons on 23 March when he claimed that he had not known about these orders until 21 March. Churchill always insisted that a decision had been taken on 11 March to bring forward from after Easter the routine deployment in the Irish Sea of a battle squadron and that this had no connection with the Ulster crisis. Certainly the

⁴ *Chief Secretary's Office, Dublin Castle: Intelligence Notes, 1913-16*, ed. B. M. Choille (Dublin, 1966), *passim*.

⁵ Scottish Record Office, RH4/84/3, 126, diary of Sir John Spencer Ewart, 18 and 19 March 1914; House of Lords Record Office, Bonar Law MS. 39/2/25, account written on 22 Apr. 1914 by H. A. Gwynne of earlier conversations with Sir John French; Imperial War Museum, 75/46/8, French MSS., Paget to Stamfordham, 25 March 1914 (also in Royal Archives, GV F.674/35 and British Library, Additional MS. 51250, Paget MSS.); Nuffield College, MS. Mottistone 22A fos. 3-15, account by G. C. N. Nicholson, n.d.

⁶ Queen's Royal Irish Hussars Regimental Headquarters, Pragnell MSS., notes by Lt.-Col. I. Hogg, 25 March 1914; National Army Museum, 7101-23-202, Roberts MSS., account by Lt.-Col. M. L. MacEwen, 31 March 1914 (also in N.A.M. 8001-6-7; H.L.R.O. 39/2/20; Birmingham University Library, Chamberlain MSS., AC 14/3/7; Churchill College Archives Centre, WMYS 2/5, Wemyss MSS.; Public Record Office, WO 35/60/2; R.A., GV F.674/83; Brit. Lib., Keyes MS. 3/17); Nuffield College, MS. Mottistone 22A fos. 3-15.

⁷ I.W.M., 75/46/8, Seely to French, 19 March 1914; P.R.O., ADM 116/1326, 'Ireland: State of Affairs: Movements of H.M. Ships'; *Correspondence Relating to Recent Events in the Irish Command* [Cd. 7329], pp. 12-15. H.C. (1914), lii. 16-19; P.R.O., ADM 53/41730 and 42698, Logs of H.M.S. *Firedrake* and H.M.S. *Gibraltar*.

⁸ The ships of the 3rd Battle Squadron were H.M.S. *King Edward VII*, *Africa*, *Britannia*, *Hibernia* and *Zealandia*, of which *Britannia* was ordered to Gibraltar. The vessels of the 4th Destroyer Flotilla ordered to sail were H.M.S. *Acasta*, *Ardent*, *Fortune*, *Hardy*, *Lynx*, *Shark*, *Sparrowhawk* and *Spitfire*.

forthcoming practice at Lamlash was discussed in cabinet on 17 March and reported by Asquith to the king.⁹ It is also clear that the actual date of assembly of the 3rd Battle Squadron, if not its reinforcement with elements of the 4th Destroyer Flotilla from Devonport, was discussed openly with Paget on 18 and 19 March. It is conceivable that the decision to order the naval concentration was Churchill's alone. Asquith indicated this in the Commons on 29 April when he declared that Churchill had taken the decision 'in his own discretion quite properly, but without communicating it to me'. At the same time the 1st Battle Cruiser Squadron, also at Arosa Bay, was ordered to Portland.¹⁰

The very different nature of all the other naval movements, which had specific purposes, from those of the 3rd Battle Squadron and the 4th Destroyer Flotilla, which were cancelled by Asquith on 21 March, provide circumstantial evidence that the original decision on the naval concentration was Churchill's alone. So, too, does the first lord's reaction to the dramatic departure of Sir Edward Carson from the house of commons on the afternoon of 19 March amid rumours of his possible arrest by the government and of the probable declaration of a provisional government once he reached Belfast. There was a last hastily arranged meeting before Paget returned to Dublin at which Churchill remarked to Sir John French that 'if Belfast should fight, "his fleet would have the town in ruins in twenty four hours"'.¹¹ Churchill was equally bellicose when the news of Gough's threatened resignation reached London on the evening of Friday 20 March.¹²

The naval movements were naturally the subject of much speculation in the subsequent debate as to whether or not there had been a Liberal 'plot' to subdue Ulster. A number of aspects appeared suspicious to the Unionist opposition. Captain C. D. Johnson of H.M.S. *Attentive*, for example, had been ordered to proceed to Bangor (county Down) after disembarking troops at Carrickfergus, and to report himself in plain clothes to the designated military governor of Belfast, Major-General Sir Nevil Macready. Lieutenant-Commander B. W. Barrow of H.M.S. *Firedrake* was similarly to report to Paget's Dublin headquarters in mufti, while Captain F. M. Leake of H.M.S. *Pathfinder* was instructed to co-operate with the military commander at Carrickfergus castle 'in certain eventualities'. Another naval officer, Lieutenant F. G. S. Peile, was temporarily attached to Paget's staff. Then there was the request on 20 March by Vice-Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly, commanding the 3rd Battle Squadron, to take four or eight field guns on board his flagship, H.M.S. *King Edward VII*, at Devonport while *en route* to Lamlash as 'they

⁹ R. R. James, *Churchill: a Study in Failure, 1900-39* (1970), pp. 46-9; Bodleian Library, MS. Asquith 7 fos. 105-6, Asquith to the king, 18 March 1914.

¹⁰ Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., lx, col. 504, Churchill, 25 March 1914; *ibid.*, col. 1364, Churchill, 2 Apr. 1914; *ibid.*, lxi, cols. 1774-5, Asquith, 29 Apr. 1914; P.R.O., ADM 1/8370/58, draft of Churchill speech, 30 March 1914; National Maritime Museum, BRG/1, Bridges diary, 19 March 1914.

¹¹ S.R.O., RH4/84/3, 126, 19 March 1914; H.L.R.O., Bonar Law MS. 39/2/25, account by H. A. Gwynne, 22 Apr. 1914; Brotherton Library, Glensk-Bathurst MSS., memorandum by H. A. Gwynne, 2 Apr. 1914.

¹² S.R.O., RH4/84/3, 126, 20 March 1914; Nuffield College, MS. Mottistone 22A fos. 3-15; R.A., GV F674/4, Hopwood to Stamfordham, 21 March 1914. When lunching with Major-General Henry Wilson on 24 March, Major A. H. Ollivant, the army officer attached to the admiralty staff as G.S.O.2, said that Churchill had planned 'a regular Jameson Raid' on Ulster (I.W.M., DS/MISC/80, HHW 23, Wilson diary, 24 March 1914).

would be useful for exercising the men during the bad weather which may be expected'.¹³

The 3rd Battle Squadron was to proceed to Lamlash only at 'ordinary speed' and would not have arrived until Monday 23 March, the date set for its concentration with the 4th Destroyer Flotilla. However, its departure from Arosa Bay was actually delayed by some seventeen hours. Mistakes in decoding telegrams similarly delayed the departure of both H.M.S. *Pathfinder* and H.M.S. *Attentive* for Dublin but, by contrast, H.M.S. *Firedrake* made a record passage to Kingstown from Southampton.¹⁴ It was inevitable that Unionists would emphasize the unexpected delays rather than the precise terms of the actual orders. Similarly, while Bayly's request to take on field guns was explained by the government in terms of the precedent set by Bayly himself in doing so during exercises in the Mediterranean in October 1912, it was soon pointed out by Unionists and press alike that the former occasion had coincided with rising international tension culminating in the outbreak of war between Montenegro and Turkey on 11 October 1912.¹⁵

Regarding the movement of troops by sea, however, Churchill had actually advised Seely not to use ships 'except as a second alternative' and had raised the possibility of taking over the railway company.¹⁶ In the event, the Great Northern did not decline to convey troops and professed its dismay that such a thing should even have been considered. On 20 March, therefore, H.M.S. *Gibraltar* and H.M.S. *Royal Arthur* were ordered to Milford Haven while *Pathfinder* and *Attentive* were detailed to take just a company of the 1st King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry to Carrickfergus, the Bedfordshires having proceeded by rail to a number of locations in the north.¹⁷ Following the cancellation of orders, the 4th Destroyer Flotilla was diverted to Southampton when off Rame Head (scarcely out of Devonport) and the 3rd Battle Squadron altered course for Devonport when off the Scillies, subsequently proceeding on tactical exercises in the Channel.¹⁸

The passage of time and the lack of other surviving evidence makes it all but impossible to determine accurately what Churchill's precise intentions may or may not have been in the crucial days of March 1914. The participants themselves offered conflicting versions of events. Churchill insisted that the naval concentration off Lamlash was fortuitous while, in discussing possible operations with his senior commanders on 20 March, Paget specifically mentioned that a naval brigade would be landed at Bangor in support of land operations.¹⁹ There is, however,

¹³ See the naval telegrams in P.R.O., ADM 1/8370/58 and ADM 116/1326. They are reprinted with minor rearrangements of sentences in Cd. 7329.

¹⁴ C.C.A.C., DRBK 3/7, de Robeck MSS.; *Dublin Evening Herald*, 21 March 1914; *The Times*, 27 Apr. 1914; H.L.R.O., Bonar Law MS. 32/1/67, Ranken to Law, 26 March 1914; *ibid.*, 32/2/9, Ogilvie to Law, 28 Apr. 1914.

¹⁵ Hansard, 5, lxi, col. 1321, Cecil, 27 Apr. 1914; *ibid.*, col. 1616, Beresford, 28 Apr. 1914; P.R.O., ADM 116/1326.

¹⁶ Bodleian Libr., MS. Asquith 40 fo. 20, Churchill to Seely, 20 March 1914.

¹⁷ C.C.A.C., DRBK 3/33, Leake to de Robeck, 25 March 1914; P.R.O., ADM 116/1326.

¹⁸ P.R.O., ADM 53/69291 and 45734, Logs of H.M.S. *Zealandia* and H.M.S. *King Edward VII*.

¹⁹ Hansard, 5, lx, col. 504, Churchill, 25 March 1914; R.A., GV F.674/44(a), account of Paget's remarks by Sir Charles Fergusson, 27 March 1914 (also in Bodleian Libr., MS. Asquith 40 fos. 104-6; Brit. Libr., Add. MS. 51250; and P.R.O., WO 35/2099).

evidence concerning attitudes towards the crisis within the navy itself and it is quite clear that many officers were implacably opposed to the apparent implications of Churchill's decisions in March 1914. The officer class as a whole, moreover, in common with their army colleagues, tended to hold conservative, if not also Unionist, political attitudes.

In addition to their natural political sympathies, a significant number of senior naval personnel at the time of the Curragh incident had personal or family links with the almost entirely Unionist Anglo-Irish ascendancy.²⁰ A number came from a land-owning background. Sir George Callaghan, the C. in C. of the Home Fleet, came from county Cork, and the family of Roger Keyes (commodore in charge of the submarine service) had property in Donegal. Lord Charles Beresford, elected Unionist M.P. for Portsmouth in 1910, and who had retired as an admiral in 1911, was a son of the marquess of Waterford. Although there is no evidence that he took much interest in Irish politics, Rear-Admiral David Beatty (commanding the 1st Battle Cruiser Squadron) sufficiently valued his birthplace in Borodale, county Wexford, to take the name for a subordinate title when he was created earl in 1919. The C. in C. at Portsmouth, Admiral Sir Hedworth Meux, was a grandson of the 1st duke of Abercorn, who owned substantial estates in county Tyrone. Rear-Admiral John de Robeck, the admiral of patrols, came from a family of Swedish nobility who had settled in county Kildare in the late eighteenth century. Other senior sailors had married into families with Irish connections. Lady Maud Ashley, the wife of Sir George Warrender, vice-admiral commanding the 2nd Battle Squadron, was a daughter of the earl of Shaftesbury, a major Belfast landlord. Her brother (the 9th earl) had been lord mayor of the city in 1907. Vice-Admiral Sir Stanley Colville (commander of the 1st Battle Squadron) was married to the daughter of the earl of Clanwilliam, another northern Irish grandee, while Vice-Admiral Sir Robert Lowry, the senior naval officer on the coast of Scotland, whose grandfather had come from Dungannon, county Tyrone, was married to a Belfast lady. These factors all help to explain the sharpness of naval reactions to the crisis and the apparent readiness of many officers to believe that there was, indeed, a government 'plot' against Ulster.

The orders issued to naval vessels on 19 March took many naval officers by surprise. The destination of the *Firedrake* when she left for Kingstown at 10.30 p.m. on 19 March was known only to her commander, Barrow, and Engineer Lieutenant Francis Ranken, who had been hastily drafted aboard as another officer was on leave.²¹ Hopwood on the *Gibraltar* was also taken aboard to receive the orders to proceed to Kingstown at midnight on the same evening.²² In the case of *Attentive* and *Pathfinder*, the admiral of patrols, Rear-Admiral John de Robeck, under whose command they came, was not told they had gone on detached duty until 21 March.

²⁰ The biographical information in the following paragraph is drawn from the *Dictionary of National Biography*, *Who's Who*, *Burke's Peerage and Baronetage*, *Burke's Landed Gentry of Ireland* and *Burke's Irish Family Records*.

²¹ H.L.R.O., Bonar Law MS. 32/1/67, Ranken to Law, 26 March 1914.

²² I.W.M., P.473(3), Forster MSS., Forster to family, 26/27 March 1914.

Indeed, de Robeck's secretary, Assistant Paymaster Basil Hood, did not learn of their movements until 5.20 p.m. on Friday 20 March when *Attentive* telegraphed from Kingstown 'not about her movements but about some quite minor matter'. De Robeck complained but was told that the orders to the vessels detached from his command had been 'sent at the time and in the manner directed by the First Sea Lord'.²³

Within the admiralty, the additional civil lord, Sir Francis Hopwood, heard of the orders for *Attentive* and *Pathfinder* on 20 March and immediately wrote to the king's private secretary, Lord Stamfordham, 'that there is a flutter of excitement & disaffection here for any such duty as it tends to "bring in the Navy"'.²⁴ This tale-telling was quite in character. Since his appointment to the admiralty in January 1912 Hopwood appears to 'have set himself up as the King's personal spy on Churchill'.²⁵ The next day he again wrote confidentially to Stamfordham informing him of the instructions issued to Bayly. Sir Francis was, however, understandably anxious that the first sea lord, Admiral H.S.H. Prince Louis of Battenberg, should not discover the communications that had taken place with Stamfordham.²⁶

In his letter of 21 March Hopwood referred to Bayly being 'sent for to come here tomorrow and he is to be invited to say whether he and his officers will do their duty and so forth'. This order perhaps reflects the doubts held in senior admiralty ranks. Certainly Rear-Admiral Arthur Leveson (who was to become the admiralty's director of operations on 1 May 1914) and Churchill's naval secretary, Rear-Admiral Dudley de Chair were both opposed to the whole Ulster venture. De Chair's wife was a close family friend of the army's former commander-in-chief, the Anglo-Irish Lord Roberts, whom many supposed to be behind much of the army agitation. De Chair also knew Major-General Henry Wilson, another prominent Anglo-Irishman, and in his autobiography recorded that they met during the March crisis.²⁷

De Chair learned of the proposed naval movements from Leveson on 20 March. Churchill refused to discuss the matter but de Chair was able to see the second sea lord, Vice-Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, and 'expressed my opinion that sea officers looked to the Board of Admiralty to see they were not put into a false position'. De Chair was as determined as Leveson 'to stop this mad move', and according to his diary intended to resign if any seamen were landed as a naval brigade. Leveson tried to persuade Churchill to divert the remainder of Bayly's squadron to Plymouth to coal when it was off the Scillies. It would also appear that it was at de Chair's prompting that Jellicoe added his weight of advice for this course of action when he saw both Churchill and Battenberg.²⁸ Hopwood certainly recorded that Jellicoe was

²³ P.R.O., ADM 116/1326, Nicholson to Battenberg, 20 March 1914, de Robeck to Greene and *vice versa*, 23 and 24 March 1914; C.C.A.C., DRBK 3/7, note by Hood, 20 March 1914.

²⁴ R.A., GV K.2553(4)/37, Hopwood to Stamfordham, 20 March 1914.

²⁵ Sir Peter Gretton, *Former Naval Person: Winston Churchill and the Royal Navy* (1968), p. 90.

²⁶ R.A., GV F.674/4, Hopwood to Stamfordham, 21 March 1914.

²⁷ Sir Dudley de Chair, *The Sea is Strong* (1961), pp. 137, 152-3. There is, however, no mention of their meeting in I.W.M., Henry Wilson's diary.

²⁸ De Chair, pp. 152-3; C.C.A.C., WMYS 2/5, D.N[nicholson] to Wemyss, 31 March 1914.

'very restive & anxious' and likely to 'field a quarrel with the First Lord on some side issue and resign'.²⁹

Throughout the crisis, rumours, plans and information were spread through a wide series of informal contacts between senior officers. Leveson, for example, discussed the Ulster issue with Colonel Sir George Aston of the Royal Marines, then on the admiralty staff and a close friend of Johnnie Gough, the brother of the chief protagonist at the Curragh.³⁰ Leveson and de Chair together were credited by Captain Douglas Nicholson, commodore of H.M. Yachts, with persuading Bayly that he should not become a 'tool' of Churchill.³¹ There does appear a certain ambiguity in Bayly's role. Contemporary correspondence records that he was prepared to carry out his orders, an impression reinforced by Bayly's own autobiography.³² Yet, both Lord Charles Beresford and Lord Esher believed that Bayly may have placed specific limitations on his interpretation of the navy's duties in Ulster. Beresford recorded that 'even he would not fire on Ulstermen'. 'I understand', wrote Esher to H. A. Gwynne, 'he refused point blank to take [field] guns and Engineers on board his Fleet, or land marines. He would have nothing to do with land operation'.³³

Esher's comment in particular does not appear compatible with Bayly's request for guns, but the Beresford and Esher version of Bayly's intentions may reflect a change in the admiral's position after meeting Leveson and de Chair at the admiralty. Little is known about the attitude of Bayly's officers and men, although Bayly's second-in-command, Montague Browning, was an old friend of Henry Wilson. There was also some concern about the seamen on one of Bayly's ships, H.M.S. *Zealandia*, who had been involved in a mutiny, entirely due to internal disciplinary factors, on 4 March 1914.³⁴ In a letter to *The Times* Leo Amery claimed that a master-at-arms on another of Bayly's squadron, H.M.S. *Hibernia*, had made enquiries as to whether seamen would be prepared to take part in operations against Ulster. Despite a number of attempts to elicit a statement, Unionist M.P.s failed to secure any confirmation of the story, or of reports of the man's subsequent transfer. In the absence of surviving correspondence, it is impossible to verify Beresford's claim that he had received information that masters-at-arms and petty officers had made similar enquiries on other ships.³⁵

²⁹ R.A., GV F.674/4, Hopwood to Stamfordham, 21 March 1914.

³⁰ Royal Marines Museum, Aston MS. 1/7, diary for 23 and 27 March 1914. Although Aston's diaries do not indicate his own personal view directly, it appears more than likely that he was in sympathy with the attitude of the Gough brothers.

³¹ C.C.A.C., WMYS 2/5, Nicholson to Wemyss, 25 March 1914.

³² *Ibid.*, Bevan to Wemyss, 26 March 1914, and Alexander-Sinclair to Wemyss, 5 Apr. 1914; N.A.M., 8001-6-12, MacEwen MSS., Gray to MacEwen, 7 Apr. 1914; Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly, *Pull Together* (1939), pp. 155-6.

³³ C.C.A.C., WMYS 2/5, Beresford to Wemyss, 7 Apr. 1914; I.W.M., Gwynne MSS., Esher to Gwynne, 21 Apr. 1914.

³⁴ A. Carew, *The Lower Deck of the Royal Navy, 1900-39* (Manchester University Press, 1981), pp. 70-1; Admiralty, B.R. 1828(1), *Mutiny in the Royal Navy, 1691-1919* (1933, repr. 1973), pp. 136-41. When the orders to Bayly's squadron were cancelled on 21 March he was still instructed to report to the admiralty with papers on the *Zealandia* affair. The stokers involved had been court-martialled on 18 and 19 March 1914.

³⁵ *The Times*, 27 Apr. 1914; Hansard, 5, lxi, col. 1112, Faber, 23 Apr. 1914, cols. 1616 and 1542, Beresford and Amery, 28 Apr. 1914, and *ibid.*, lxii, col. 23, Hall, 5 May 1914. The gossip about masters-at-arms may be

More evidence is available for the other ships dispatched to Ulster. Aboard H.M.S. *Firedrake*, Engineer Lieutenant Ranken was told the destination of the ship by Barrow 'for family reasons', which suggests that the former had relatives in Ulster. Indeed, Ranken informed Barrow 'that I had signed the British Covenant'³⁶ and that I should be no party to any aggressive move against Ulster if that were the intention in sending us to Kingstown'. Had General Paget, he declared roundly, 'joined for passage during my régime only one course was open to me—to decline to be a party to propelling the ship'. Ranken was able to hand over his duties to another officer on 22 March.³⁷

For his part, Barrow 'was prepared to execute any orders given him by a superior officer', but his counterpart commanding H.M.S. *Pathfinder* in Belfast Lough most certainly was not. Captain Leake reported to his superior, de Robeck, on 24 March that 'it seems to me only fair to you as my Admiral to let you know that I have no intention of going against Ulster should the occasion arise'. As early as 21 March, Leake had lunched with the Unionist M.P. for Antrim East, Colonel J. M. McCalmont, and he did so again four days later. On 30 March he reported to the admiralty that he had also met Sir Edward Carson and the military commander of the U.V.F., Lieutenant-General Sir George Richardson, and he enclosed a report on the efficiency of the U.V.F.'s local signalling corps in Carrickfergus. On 5 April, by which time *Pathfinder* had returned to Bantry for calibration, Leake reported that not only had he allowed his crew to exchange signals with the U.V.F., but that he had also permitted them to be 'entertained' by the Ulstermen. Seamen had been shown U.V.F. stores in Belfast and had even been entertained to tea with Sir Edward Carson.³⁸

The orders issued to *Pathfinder* and *Attentive* on 19 March had given permission for 'reliable men' to be given shore leave during daylight hours, but having tea with Carson was hardly what had been intended. Moreover, Churchill was incensed when reports of the friendly signals apparently exchanged between the U.V.F. and *Pathfinder* appeared in the press. The first lord demanded that Leake be called to account and 'asked whether he had received any instructions from General Macready to make such communications'. Churchill also directed that the commanding officers of the two ships that had now replaced *Attentive* and *Pathfinder* in Belfast Lough—H.M.S. *Adventure* and H.M.S. *Foresight*—be instructed:

that they are not to hold unnecessary communication with the shore, nor to accept from or to offer hospitality to civilians nor to allow their men to go into Belfast unless there is

the origin of a story told some seven years later by Rear-Admiral Philip Nelson-Ward (director of navigation at the admiralty in 1914) that 'he knew for a fact that immense numbers of the men would have thrown the gun-sights overboard if sent out against Ulster' (P.R.O. of Northern Ireland, D.1633/2/25, Spender MSS., diary of Lady Lilian Spender, 1 Nov. 1921).

³⁶ The British Covenant, launched on 3 March 1914, was designed to enable people in Great Britain to express their support for the Unionist cause (see A. T. Q. Stewart, *The Ulster Crisis* (1967), pp. 134–5).

³⁷ H.L.R.O., Bonar Law MS. 32/1/67, Ranken to Law, 26 March 1914.

³⁸ C.C.A.C., DRBK 3/7 and 3/33, Leake to de Robeck, 24, 21 and 25 March, and 5 Apr. 1914. Carson himself told Henry Wilson of the visits of the *Pathfinder* crew (I.W.M., DS/MISC/80, HHW 23, 29 March 1914).

special reason for it. The discussion of political questions is not to be allowed on board the ships, nor are the officers to enter into the discussion of such questions with civilians.³⁹

Leake replied to the charges on 7 April that the press reports were inaccurate and that his parting signal to the U.V.F. had not been acknowledged from the shore in any way. Rather disarmingly, he also remarked that he had allowed contact with the U.V.F. since 'they were ostensibly created with a view to keeping order' and could assist him in his own duties in this regard. Leake escaped on 8 April with a mild reprimand that he should have shown 'greater discretion'.⁴⁰

Leake's defence had been forwarded to the admiralty through de Robeck who was also heartily opposed to the use of the navy against Ulster. His papers include an account of one of the crucial meetings in Ireland between Paget and his officers, which was widely circulated among those sympathetic to the Goughs. There is, moreover, also an undated and incomplete draft which is actually a copy of part of Johnnie Gough's letter of resignation to the War Office.⁴¹ One naval officer who supported Ulster, Captain C. D. S. Raikes of H.M.S. *St. George*, told a colleague's wife that his views were shared by de Robeck, 'so I'm in good company as he's a straight one if ever there was one'.⁴² Similarly, on 23 March, de Robeck 'nailed' the assistant secretary to the committee of imperial defence, Commander B. E. Domville, 'for a long chat about Ulster—he was very excited and warlike and showed me a letter from Lowry'. This implies that Vice-Admiral Sir Robert Lowry, senior officer on the coast of Scotland, shared de Robeck's attitude. There is little doubt about Domville's opinion. He had once attended the presentation of colours to a U.V.F. unit and now assured de Robeck that he 'was ready when the time comes'. In his diary Domville refers to Churchill both as a 'bloody villain' and a 'bloody ruffian'.⁴³

Most naval accounts of the crisis indicate that both the C. in C. of the Home Fleet, Admiral Sir George Callaghan, and the commander of the 2nd Battle Squadron, Vice-Admiral Sir George Warrender, threatened to resign if 'ordered to go against Ulster'.⁴⁴ Callaghan is clearly one of the 'two C. in C.s' usually cited as prepared to resign. One source names Admiral Sir Hedworth Meux, C. in C. Portsmouth, as the other.⁴⁵ Callaghan's motive appears to have been that the European situation was 'too critical' for the army and navy to be torn apart by the coercion of Ulster although, interestingly, it was precisely this motive which

³⁹ P.R.O., ADM 116/1326, Leake to Greene, 30 March 1914, and Churchill to Battenberg and Greene, 31 March 1914.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Leake to de Robeck, 7 Apr. 1914, and admiralty to Leake, 28 Apr. 1914.

⁴¹ C.C.A.C., DRBK 3/7.

⁴² C.C.A.C., WMYS 2/5, Julia Alexander-Sinclair to Wemyss, 3 Apr. 1914.

⁴³ N.M.M., DOM/23, Domville MSS., diary for 21, 23 and 24 March 1914; Sir Barry Domville, *By and Large* (1936), p. 49.

⁴⁴ C.C.A.C., WMYS 2/5, Stapleton-Cotton to Wemyss, 25 March 1914, and Bevan to Wemyss, 26 March 1914; N.A.M., 8001-6-11, Gray to MacEwen, 4 Apr. 1914 (based on a letter to Gray's wife from Mrs. Wemyss which also contained news communicated to Wemyss by Stapleton-Cotton); de Chair, p. 153; Lady Wester Wemyss, *The Life and Letters of Lord Wester Wemyss* (1935), p. 146; Sir William Goodenough, *A Rough Record* (1943), p. 89.

⁴⁵ P.R.O. of Northern Ireland, D. 1633/2/25, diary of Lady Lilian Spender, 1 Nov. 1921.

prompted Major-General Sir Charles Fergusson of the 5th Division in Ireland to refuse to contemplate resignation over the Ulster issue.⁴⁶

Another leading sailor, and incidentally another subordinate of de Robeck, who wholeheartedly supported the Goughs was Commodore Roger Keyes, attached to H.M.S. *Dolphin* at Portsmouth as commodore of submarines. Considering his Anglo-Irish family background and since his sister was married to Johnnie Gough, this was not at all surprising. In writing to Hubert Gough, another Keyes sister mentioned that 'Roger who feels as keen as anyone' had heard a full account of events from Johnnie Gough and also 'that a batch of the most senior sailors here are going to resign'.⁴⁷ Keyes sent a strong telegram of support to Johnnie on 23 March.⁴⁸ The following day he visited the admiralty. Although 'most awfully pleased' with the reactions of de Chair and Leveson to the crisis, Keyes had decided to be 'very careful' but, when he met Jellicoe who appeared 'ready to be talked to', Keyes 'told him everything and said we the service looked to him to see we weren't put in such a position as to make it necessary for us to resign'. Having thus reinforced the impact of de Chair's prompting of Jellicoe, he went to Harwich on 25 March to carry out routine inspections. Writing that evening to his wife, Keyes expressed the hope that both Seely and Churchill would be forced to resign and reported that he had talked with Captain G. C. Cayley who had expressed support for Keyes's views.⁴⁹

Similar evidence of widespread concern is indicated by Beresford's observation to Lord Stamfordham on 23 March that he had had 'a multitude of letters' from Portsmouth where 'a large meeting had been held and a resolution passed'.⁵⁰ In the Commons two days later Beresford again referred to his voluminous correspondence and declared that 'I have had a great deal of information on the question of what the officers and men intend, under certain circumstances, which affect their conscience and their honour'.⁵¹ Yet Beresford, who was to press Churchill continually on naval movements, claimed in a letter to the wife of Rear-Admiral R. E. Wemyss that he had counselled all naval personnel who had asked his opinion that they should obey orders:

Some of them have asked me what I would have done if I was still on full pay. To these I have answered that I should not think of saying anything to the Government unless the Army was actually employed, or the Navy was actually ordered to be employed against Ulster.

It was advice he repeated in an open letter to the press.⁵²

⁴⁶ *Army and Curragh Incident*, pp. 15, 135-44, 339-42; Sir James Fergusson of Kilkerran, *The Curragh Incident* (1964), pp. 170-81.

⁴⁷ H. P. Gough MSS., Katherine Keyes to Gough, 25 March 1914.

⁴⁸ J. E. Gough MSS., telegram from Roger Keyes to Gough, 23 March 1914: 'Hurrah, Hurrah, Well done Goughs. Heartiest Congratulations, Result will give enormous satisfaction to the Navy'.

⁴⁹ Keyes family MSS., Roger Keyes to Eva Keyes, 24 and 25 March 1914.

⁵⁰ R.A., GV F.674/24, Beresford to Stamfordham, 23 March 1914.

⁵¹ Hansard, 5, lx, col. 379, Beresford, 25 March 1914.

⁵² C.C.A.C., WMYS 2/5, Beresford to Mrs. Wemyss, 7 Apr. 1914; *Portsmouth Times and Hampshire County Journal*, 27 March 1914, p. 10; *Western Morning News*, 23 March 1914, p. 5.

Wemyss, then on half pay at Cannes, was one of the people best placed to assess the amount of disaffection in the navy. Both he and his wife had a wide range of contacts within the service. Mrs. Wemyss actually wrote an article on the affair for the *National Review* under the pseudonym 'Trafalgar'.⁵³ Their contacts also extended to politicians. Wemyss had at least one telephone conversation with Austen Chamberlain during the crisis and was preparing to return home when the situation was resolved. Given this detailed intelligence, Mrs. Wemyss's opinion that 'the feeling is universal in the Navy of sympathy with the Army and the Cavalry Brigade and especially with the younger officers with whom Gough is a hero' must carry weight.⁵⁴ In particular, letters in the Wemyss papers show considerable disquiet among officers of the 1st Battle Squadron at Devonport. According to Captain E. S. Alexander-Sinclair of H.M.S. *Temeraire*, when the news of the Curragh reached three ships of the squadron then in port, there was no collusion in coming to the conclusion that 'we would have nothing to do with coercing Ulster'. Alexander-Sinclair believed that most other officers at Devonport agreed, only two voicing dissent: 'One said he couldn't afford it and the other that he would look the other way if given blockade duty'. More specifically, Alexander-Sinclair's wife reported that Captain H. H. Bruce of H.M.S. *Hercules* and Captain G. P. W. Hope of H.M.S. *Superb*, together with her husband, met Vice-Admiral Sir Stanley Colville on *Temeraire* and told him 'that they felt he ought to know that if they were ordered to Belfast for blockading purposes or civil war, they would not be able to go—and that they would at once resign'. Colville agreed to see Callaghan. Others named in Julia Alexander-Sinclair's correspondence as opposing the use of the navy against Ulster are Captain J. U. Fairie of H.M.S. *Adventure*, although he left the ship shortly after its arrival in Irish waters; Captain the Hon. Algernon Boyle (a younger son of the 5th earl of Shannon, with estates in county Cork) attached to H.M.S. *Vivid*, the Devonport gunnery school, who was 'bubbling over with fury with his resignation in his pocket'; and Captain J. S. Dumaresq of H.M.S. *Shannon* in the 2nd Cruiser Squadron based on Chatham. Dumaresq's superior, Rear-Admiral C. E. Madden, although of Anglo-Irish extraction, appears to have been ready to do his duty, but other correspondents with Wemyss, including the flag captain to the C. in C. at Portsmouth, Captain R. G. A. W. Stapleton-Cotton, and Lieutenant R. H. L. Bevan were sympathetic to the Goughs.⁵⁵ As with their military colleagues, some sailors were prepared to sacrifice everything for Ulster. On 20 March Captain Philip Dumas, the assistant director of torpedoes, learned that 'we may be ordered . . . to coerce Ulster. Conscientiously I can't do it and miserable to think I may thereby be forced to ruin Mops and Joey. It's very hard and I pray we may be left alone'.⁵⁶

Evidence of opinion among junior officers comes from Lieutenant H. T. Baillie-Grohman, serving on H.M.S. *Lively* in the 7th Destroyer Flotilla based at Devon-

⁵³ Mrs. Wemyss's article, 'The Services and the Situation', was published in the March 1914 issue of the *National Rev.*, lxiii, no. 373, pp. 153-8. See also C.C.A.C., WMYS 2/6, article by Mrs. Wemyss.

⁵⁴ N.A.M., 8001-6-11, Gray (quoting Mrs. Wemyss) to MacEwen, 4 Apr. 1914.

⁵⁵ C.C.A.C., WMYS 2/5, Julia Alexander-Sinclair to Wemyss, 3 Apr. 1914; Alexander-Sinclair to Mrs. Wemyss, 5 Apr. 1914; Stapleton-Cotton to Wemyss, 25 March 1914; Bevan to Wemyss, 26 March 1914.

⁵⁶ I.W.M., PP/MCR/96, Dumas diaries, 20 March 1914. Mops and Joey were Dumas's wife and son.

port. According to his autobiography, half a dozen young officers of the flotilla 'agreed that if we were not allowed to resign, or otherwise unable to avoid this service, we would steam our ships into Belfast or Londonderry and place ourselves under the orders of Sir Edward Carson'. Baillie-Grohman believed that 'the great majority' of the crews of these smaller vessels would have supported such action although it was not discussed with the flotilla commander, Captain F. Clifton-Brown of H.M.S. *Skirmisher*.⁵⁷ Among retired officers, Admiral Sir Percy Scott, the gunnery expert, offered his services to the U.V.F. but 'they had so many military officers ready to serve with them that I was not wanted'.⁵⁸ Similarly, a half-pay naval officer in the national reserve, Lieutenant G. D. H. Mackinnon, was accused of inciting fellow reservists to attend the great Unionist rally in Hyde Park on 4 April in uniform.⁵⁹ Further afield, the 4th Battle Squadron at Gibraltar was reported in the *Naval and Military Record* as being in broad sympathy with the army.⁶⁰

Naval opposition to involvement in the affairs of Ulster could not fail to have had at least a temporary effect upon discipline and relationships within the service, although the evidence is rather less conclusive in this respect than in the case of the army. Naval officers were not actually confronted with the same kind of ultimatum as faced Hubert Gough and his colleagues. Thus, Churchill was able to reply to a Commons question on 30 March that no resignations had been tendered from the admiralty board. Repeatedly, he stated that no enquiries had been made to ascertain officers' or seamen's attitudes since 'they are expected to obey without question orders which reach them through the proper channels from lawfully constituted authority'.⁶¹ Indeed, the *Naval and Military Record* castigated the sea lords for their lack of action in the belief that there had been no protest within the admiralty against the possible use of the navy in Ulster.⁶²

Certainly, there were officers, such as Bayly and Barrow, who were prepared to do their duty, however distasteful it might be. The young Stephen King-Hall, later a well-known broadcaster and then a sub-lieutenant on H.M.S. *Southampton* in the 1st Light Cruiser Squadron at Portland, was also prepared to do his duty. Although his mother was from Ulster, King-Hall was not a 'rabid Ulsterman' and regarded Carson as a rebel against the Crown. It would appear that his commanding officer, Commander W. E. Goodenough, was of similar mind since he told his subordinates that they 'might have to go and bombard Belfast and that would be that'.⁶³ Beresford, too, recognized that the navy was divided, although he believed it was a

⁵⁷ I.W.M., P.366, typescript autobiography of Vice-Admiral H. T. Baillie-Grohman, pp. 116-18. Sixty years after the Curragh incident, Baillie-Grohman retained strong opinions on the subject: 'Personally, like many others, I joined the R.N. on account of the German menace, not to force a loyal Ulster (as she then was) to come under a hated Dublin rule. We were not dummies to be used as the tools of politicians' (letter from Baillie-Grohman to one of the authors, 21 Jan. 1976).

⁵⁸ Sir Percy Scott, *Fifty Years in the Royal Navy* (1919), pp. 273-4.

⁵⁹ Hansard, 5, lx, col. 1948, Cowan, 8 Apr. 1914.

⁶⁰ *Naval and Military Record*, xxxii (1914), 232 (8 Apr.).

⁶¹ Hansard, 5, lx, cols. 533, 821 and 1026, Churchill for 26, 30 and 31 March 1914.

⁶² *Naval and Military Record*, xxxii (1914), 209 (1 Apr.); *ibid.*, p. 273 (8 Apr.).

⁶³ S. King-Hall, *My Naval Life, 1906-29* (1952), p. 87.

minority who 'from equally conscientious and honourable motives would think they should obey orders under any circumstances'.⁶⁴ Some officers, though, were apparently indifferent to the crisis. Lunching with colleagues on 22 March, Captain Philip Dumas was 'amazed to find that none of them have realised in the least the horrible dangers of the past few days. Truly Naval officers are like children'.⁶⁵

Some dissension among officers is, therefore, evident. Of course, only recently the service had been split by the feud between Beresford and Admiral Lord Fisher, a partisanship subversive of discipline identified by Professor Marder as an increasing hallmark of Fisher's years as first sea lord between 1904 and 1910. Moreover, the growing unrest on the lower deck, of which the *Zealandia* mutiny was the most recent manifestation, appeared 'all the more defensible' to naval ratings in the light of their officers' likely attitude to orders in the event of the navy being used to coerce Ulster.⁶⁶

Significantly, an article by 'Admiral' in the *United Service Magazine* in July 1914 linked the Ulster crisis with the lower deck unrest and urged the need to avoid 'dragging the Navy into politics'.⁶⁷ The latter view was echoed by both the *Naval and Military Record* and the organ of the Navy League, *The Navy*. Nevertheless, the link with lower deck grievances was never far below the surface in a brief exchange of correspondence on the Ulster crisis in the *Naval and Military Record* between a 'Lieutenant, R.N.' from Portsmouth, who defended Churchill's role, and a number of other equally anonymous writers who most certainly did not.⁶⁸ There was more lively correspondence along similar lines in the *Hampshire Telegraph and Naval Chronicle* whose weekly columnist on naval matters was F. T. Jane, founder of the *Naval Annual* and of *All the World's Ships*. Jane resolutely favoured the cause of Ulster and claimed a large lower deck response in support of his views, but a number of anonymous correspondents, such as 'R.N.', and 'J.M.' accused him of attempting to undermine discipline on the lower deck.⁶⁹

For sailors anxious to 'get back to normal', the conclusion of the immediate Curragh crisis by the end of March was undoubtedly greeted with much relief. 'Here', wrote Admiral Sir Henry Jackson, chief of the naval war staff on 3 April,

there has been excitement and no administrative work done for weeks. I am heartily sick of everything connected with this Building and wish I were out of it. Politics rule the day and permeate everything. I look forward to escaping from them shortly.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ C.C.A.C., WMYS 2/5, Beresford to Mrs. Wemyss, 7 Apr. 1914.

⁶⁵ I.W.M., PP/MCR/96, 22 March 1914.

⁶⁶ A. J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: the Royal Navy in the Fisher era, 1904-19* (5 vols., 1961-78), i. 88-104; Carew, pp. 62-80.

⁶⁷ 'Admiral', 'Discipline in the Navy and the Ulster Pogrom', *United Service Magazine*, no. 1028 (July 1914), pp. 337-42. For details of the *Zealandia* lower deck unrest see *The Fleet*, issues of May 1914 (especially p. 137) and June 1914.

⁶⁸ *Naval and Military Record*, xxxii (1914), 209, 232, 244, 260, 275 (Apr.-May); *The Navy*, xix (1914), no. 4, p. 89 (Apr.).

⁶⁹ *Hampshire Telegraph and Naval Chronicle*, issues of 3, 10, and 17 Apr., and 15 May 1914 (p. 9 in each case).

⁷⁰ N.M.M., MLN/209/7, Milne MSS., Jackson to Admiral Sir Berkeley Milne (C. in C. Mediterranean), 3 Apr. 1914.

On 2 April 1914 all the vessels remaining in Irish waters were withdrawn for Easter leave, there being no immediate intention to re-introduce them thereafter. But before the end of April, Unionist gun-running gave the navy once more a sensitive political role: to prevent further importations of arms, whether by Unionists or Nationalists.

On 25 April the U.V.F. succeeded in landing a large quantity of arms at Larne and, three days later, the 4th Destroyer Flotilla was deployed to Ballycastle (county Antrim), Bangor and Dundrum Bay to prevent any recurrence.⁷¹ From the beginning the government was highly sensitive about naval involvement. On several occasions Churchill refused to discuss any aspect of operations.⁷² Mindful of Leake's activities a month previously, the admiralty issued particular instructions to the flotilla about contacts with the shore:

The strictest formality must be observed by the ships placed under your orders in all relations with the shore. No messages should be exchanged with political organisations of any kind, and individual exchange of hospitality should be avoided as a general rule. No visitor should be allowed on board except on business. No discussions of political questions with civilians or among the complements should be allowed. Leave on shore in towns should be restricted to a minimum.⁷³

It was, in fact, exceedingly difficult to avoid contact with the shore. On the very day that he received the instructions, Captain G. G. Barton requested that the lord mayor and harbour board of Belfast be allowed to make a formal visit to the flotilla and this was agreed.⁷⁴ Similarly, Lieutenant-Commander H.D. Colville of H.M.S. *Porpoise* received a visit on 22 May from the mayor and town clerk of Londonderry 'and the usual hospitality of the service' was extended, although Colville kept back a crowd of 200 who had accompanied the entourage and refused shore leave to his own men.⁷⁵ On 4 June, Vice-Admiral Sir C. H. Coke, who had been re-appointed as senior naval officer on the coast of Ireland when his successor had died suddenly a month earlier, reported that ships had exchanged signals with U.V.F. units in the mistaken belief that they were real coastal signal stations.⁷⁶

There must also be some doubt as to the effectiveness of the blockade of the northern and eastern coasts since officers of the 4th Destroyer Flotilla appear to have sympathized with the Ulstermen. Baillie-Grohman discussed Ulster many years later with Admiral Sir William Whitworth, who commanded H.M.S.

⁷¹ P.R.O., ADM 116/1327, 'Position of Coast Guard in Civil Disturbances: Defence of Coast Guard Buildings, etc: 4th Flotilla Destroyers to Ireland to act as Coast Guard Cruisers: Arms landed at Donaghadee and Bangor, April 1914'.

⁷² Hansard, 5, lxii, cols. 33 and 1121, Churchill, 4 and 13 May 1914; *ibid.*, lxiii, col. 20, Churchill, 25 May 1914.

⁷³ P.R.O., ADM 116/1327, admiralty to Captain G. G. Barton (district captain and deputy to admiral commanding coast guard), 30 Apr. 1914 (also in ADM 1/8387/220, 'Landing of Arms in Ireland: Preventative Measures to Preclude Importation').

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Barton to admiralty, 30 Apr. 1914.

⁷⁵ P.R.O., ADM 116/1328, 'Prevention of Landing of Arms: Patrol Reports and Proceedings', Colville report, 22 May 1914.

⁷⁶ P.R.O., ADM 1/8370/58, 'Crisis in North Ireland', Coke to admiralty, 4 June 1914 (also in ADM 116/1327).

Cockatrice in the blockading squadron in 1914. Whitworth maintained that he and others so employed 'just did not play' and 'turned a blind eye',⁷⁷ a reaction apparently widespread enough for Lord Esher to suggest in early May 1914 that no naval blockade of Ulster would work.⁷⁸ By contrast, the surviving correspondence and patrol reports imply that more urgency was attached to the possibility of Irish nationalists attempting to emulate the U.V.F. in gun-running after Larne.⁷⁹ Coke's request to extend the patrol to the south coast caused some wry amusement in the admiralty when he justified it on the grounds that 'Jews with Birmingham or London motor cars' were much in evidence in southern Ireland, presumably doing deals with the Nationalists. But on 11 June the admiralty agreed to his request and the cruisers H.M.S. *Forward* and H.M.S. *Foresight* were added so that the entire Irish coast could be covered. All vessels in Irish waters were then exempted from the planned test mobilization of the Fleet.⁸⁰

Churchill noted that the Royal Irish Constabulary was far more active in the south west of Ireland than it had ever been in the north, and it is conceivable that the same was true of the navy.⁸¹ Certainly Commander H. N. Garrett of H.M.S. *Foresight* reported on 5 July that the restriction on leave was advisable outside Ulster and had been 'borne out by two or three small instances'. On one occasion, 'the mere fact that a few members of the ship's company were discovered to be natives of Ulster was sufficient to raise the ire of one individual'.⁸² A number of vessels were successfully kept off from landing suspected arms cargoes in the south, yet the navy could not prevent Nationalists landing a consignment of weapons at Howth, near Dublin, on 28 July 1914. At the time H.M.S. *Forward* had been some twenty-two miles away, but could not be summoned by rocket because the landing had taken place in daylight.⁸³

Although it is not clear whether Churchill as first lord of the admiralty ultimately intended to employ Royal Navy personnel ashore in the event of any large-scale military operations in Ulster in March 1914, the naval movements he instigated suggested that possibility to many contemporaries. The officers of the Royal Navy were not placed in the same position as those of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade in being offered any kind of ultimatum as to whether or not they would be willing to serve against Ulster, although, as has been noted, Lord Charles Beresford believed that some had been asked their views and there was the apparent enquiry made among seamen on H.M.S. *Hibernia*. There was certainly no intention on the part of Churchill to extend the guarantee offered Gough to the officers of the navy.⁸⁴

⁷⁷ I.W.M., P.366, pp. 116-18.

⁷⁸ Brit. Libr., Add. MS. 50901, diary of C. P. Scott, 4 May 1914.

⁷⁹ P.R.O., ADM 116/1327, 1328.

⁸⁰ P.R.O., ADM 1/8370/58, note on Coke's letter of 4 June 1914. Coke had caused annoyance in Feb. 1914 when issuing alarmist orders to coast guard stations which the admiralty felt unjustified by events at that stage (ADM 116/1327).

⁸¹ P.R.O., ADM 1/8730/58, note by Churchill, 4 June 1914.

⁸² P.R.O., ADM 116/1328, report by Garrett, 5 July 1914.

⁸³ P.R.O., ADM 1/8387/220, Coke to admiralty, 28 July 1914.

⁸⁴ Hansard, 5, lx, col. 533, Churchill, 26 March 1914.

Nevertheless, the events of March 1914 were viewed with considerable concern by many naval officers and, had any intention become clear to use the Royal Navy directly against Ulster, it seems likely that there would have been resignations from both senior and junior ranks. A network of contacts did exist between naval officers sympathetic to the cause of Ulster and some were in close touch with events within the army and even the Unionist party. There is evidence of some internal division as a result of the decisions made in March 1914 as to the legitimacy or otherwise of potential action against Ulster, and the continued involvement of naval vessels in attempting to prevent gun-running into Ireland between April and July 1914 ensured that the issue remained alive in succeeding months. The Royal Navy was much less affected by the Curragh incident than the army, but this is not to suggest that the effect on discipline was any less potentially serious in the senior service. Yet, as in the case of the army, the outbreak of war in August 1914 offered new and consuming professional challenges which overrode the heated political debates of the previous March.

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