

‘We personally had no quarrel with the rioters’: Anzacs in Dublin during the Easter Rising 1916

by JEFF KILDEA *

On 1 July 1916 the Melbourne *Age* published the text of a letter it said had been written to Richard Garland, chairman of the Dunlop Rubber Co., by an unnamed Australian officer, ‘who while on leave in Ireland took part in suppressing the Sinn Féin rebellion’.¹ In the letter the officer described a series of events in which members of the Crown forces committed atrocities against Irish civilians.

Although the letter as published did not contain an admission that the officer had any personal part in the killing or wounding of civilians, its tone suggests, at the very least, indifference rather than outrage at the conduct he witnessed. As a result the letter provoked a strong reaction in Australia, particularly from Irish Catholics already incensed by the British Government’s methods of suppressing the rising and the execution of its leaders.

But the Australian officer’s letter was not the only first-hand account published in the press describing the activities of Anzac soldiers during the Easter Rising. In the months that followed, newspapers in Australia and New Zealand carried a number of letters and reports by Anzac troops recounting their experiences in Dublin during Easter week 1916.

This paper describes the part played by the Anzacs in assisting to suppress the Easter Rising as related by contemporary Irish commentators and by the soldiers themselves and then considers how their actions during Easter week were perceived at home and how we might regard them today.²

The Role of the Anzacs

No Anzac units were in Ireland during Easter Week or at any time thereafter. The Anzacs involved in suppressing the rising were individuals, mostly veterans of Gallipoli who had been evacuated sick or wounded to England and had decided to spend their Easter leave in Ireland.³ In addition, Australians and New Zealanders serving in Irish and British regiments were in Dublin when the rising broke out or belonged to units, such as the King Edward’s Horse (also known as

¹ *The Age*, 1 July 1916, p. 11.

² This paper supplements the original research carried out with assistance from the Australian Army History Research Grants Scheme and published in ‘Called to arms: Australian soldiers in the Easter Rising 1916’, in *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, No 39, October 2003 (<https://www.awm.gov.au/journal/j39/kildea/>) and *Anzacs and Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press; and Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007), ch. 2.

³ Two New Zealanders, Sergeant Frederick Leslie Nevin of Christchurch and Corporal John Godwin Garland of Auckland, were on leave from the hospital ship *Marama* on which they were working as medical orderlies.

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the King's Overseas Dominions Regiment), which was sent from the Curragh late in the afternoon of Easter Monday to reinforce the Dublin garrison.⁴

While, in the overall context of the rising, the role played by the Anzacs is not significant, they and their dominion comrades made an important contribution to the Crown cause during the first 48 hours before reinforcements arrived from England, harassing the rebels and confining them to their initial positions. This was especially so at Trinity College, where six Anzacs had taken refuge along with six South Africans and two Canadians, along the Liffey quays near Kingsbridge (now Heuston) station and at Portobello (now Cathal Brugha) Barracks near Rathmines.

Trinity College

At Trinity the Anzacs were deployed not only to defend the college should it be attacked but also to keep the rebels pinned down by bringing fire to bear from positions on the roof and upper floors of the main building, which had good fields of fire along Grafton Street towards St Stephens Green, Dame Street towards the City Hall and Sackville (now O'Connell) Street towards the G.P.O.⁵ In a letter home that was published in the newspapers, Sergeant Alexander Don of Dunedin wrote:⁶

[On Monday] night we kept the rebels from taking the Royal Bank of Ireland by firing from the roof of Trinity College. There were only a few armed men in Trinity that night and it took some holding as it occupies the whole block and we were right in the centre of the rebels.

A number of contemporary Irish accounts mention the role of Anzac troops in Trinity College. Wells' and Marlowe's *History of the Irish Rebellion of 1916*, published a few months after the rising, states:⁷

Stray soldiers were summoned from the adjacent streets and from the Central Soldiers' Club hard by the College to reinforce the garrison; these included some 'Anzac' sharpshooters.

⁴ King Edward's Horse was a cavalry regiment originally formed in 1901 and made up of soldiers from throughout the Empire. When war broke out the regiment recruited men from the dominions and colonies who were stranded in England and unable to return to their home countries to enlist. Australians in England were not permitted to enlist in the Australian Imperial Force (*Age* 1 July 1916, p. 3). At the time of the rising two reserve squadrons of King Edward's Horse were stationed at the Curragh and Longford. Accounts of individual Australian members of the K.E.H. involved in the rising appeared in the press, for example: Trooper F.M. Battye of Sydney (*Age* 23 September 1916, p. 20); Trooper Harry Hill Brooker of Woodville, South Australia (*Advertiser* (Adelaide) 5 December 1917, p. 7); Sergeant Jack Crowley of West Wyalong, New South Wales (*Mirror* 30 September 1916, p. 7; *Wagga Wagga Express* 12 October 1916, p. 2); Lieutenant Walter Gordon Helpman of Warrnambool, Victoria (*Argus* 4 July 1916, p. 7); Sergeant Ian Bryce MacBean of Claremont, Western Australia (*West Australian* 4 July 1919, p. 6). In addition, Australians in the Royal Army Medical Corps and Voluntary Aid Detachments assisted the wounded. For example: Dr Cecil G. McAdam of Melbourne (*Argus* 15 June 1916, p. 6); Edward Oswald Marks, medical student, of Brisbane helped with the wounded at Mount Street Bridge (<http://blogs.slq.qld.gov.au/ww1/2016/03/30/ted-marks-and-the-dublin-easter-rising-1916/>).

⁵ As it turned out, the rebels made no attempt to capture Trinity College. According to at least one account, the college had been included in the original plans as one of the buildings to be occupied, but that element of the plan was abandoned because of insufficient numbers available to carry out the task (Witness Statement of Thomas Slater, BMH WS 263, pp 14-15).

⁶ *Bendigo Advertiser*, 9 August 1916, p. 3.

⁷ Maunsell & Co., Dublin, 1916, p. 154.

In an article in *Blackwood's Magazine* John Joly, Professor of Geology at Trinity College, wrote of his experiences of the rising. Using the pseudonym ‘One of the Garrison’, Joly described how he joined the Anzacs on the roof of the college:⁸

They were undoubtedly men fashioned for the enjoyment of danger. And certainly it would be harder to find nicer comrades. Alas for thousands of these fine soldiers who have left their bones on Gallipoli!

Joly claimed, ‘There can be no doubt that the accurate fire maintained from the college was an important factor in the salvation of the City’. This was an opinion shared by Robert Tweedy, a member of Dublin University Officers’ Training Corps (O.T.C.), who wrote to his mother:⁹

A machine gun and a party of sharpshooters on the roof did good execution down Sackville Street, and T.C.D. may be said to have saved the banks and business premises of the most important thoroughfares of Dublin. Only one shop within range of our rifles was looted ... It is said that T.C.D. saved the city, and I am proud to have been one of the garrison.

Another O.T.C. cadet, Gerard Fitzgibbon, wrote to a friend:¹⁰

[T]he Anzacs were given all the eligible situations, which it must be allowed they deserved. They were an extraordinary gang. I have never seen their like.

As veterans of Gallipoli, it is little wonder that their service was highly valued as the garrison at Trinity in the initial period mostly comprised young officer cadets with no experience of battle. One of the rebel leaders, Commandant W.J. Brennan-Whitmore, also acknowledged the military skill of the Anzacs. In his memoirs of the rising Whitmore related how the rebels had rigged up a flying-fox across Sackville Street in order to convey a tin can carrying messages from the G.P.O. to the rebel position in North Earl Street. After being captured, Whitmore told one of his guards (described as an Australian but in all likelihood a New Zealander, Sergeant Frederick Nevin of Christchurch):¹¹

By the way. You British had some pretty good snipers We had a cable across Sackville Street and one of your fellows hit the canister from Trinity.

But it was not only tin cans that fell victim to the Anzac sharpshooters. Professor Joly, in his article, related how early on Tuesday morning the Anzacs on the roof of the college shot a rebel despatch-rider.¹² The victim of the Anzac marksmanship was Gerald Keogh, a 22-year old shop assistant from Ranelagh. It

⁸ The article was republished as ‘Inside Trinity College’ in Roger McHugh (ed.), Dublin 1916, Arlington Books, London, 1966, pp 158–74.

⁹ Letter 7 May 1916 from Robert Tweedy to his Mother in Letters of 1916 website: <http://letters1916.maynoothuniversity.ie/explore/letters/255>.

¹⁰ Letter 10 May 1916 Gerard Fitzgibbon to William Hugh Blake (T.C.D. Manuscripts: MS 11107/1).

¹¹ W. J. Brennan-Whitmore, *Dublin burning: the Easter Rising from behind the barricades* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1996, pp 116-18). A version of the conversation is set out in details in Max Caulfield, *The Easter Rebellion* (2nd ed.; Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1995), p. 250. See also Brennan-Whitmore’s account in *An tÓglach* 6 February 1926, p. 5 and P. de Rosa, *Rebels: the Irish Rising of 1916* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), p. 330. Seamus Daly, who was with Brennan-Whitmore at the Custom House, refers to a New Zealand sergeant in his witness statement to the Bureau of Military History (WS 360, pp 50-52).

¹² ‘Inside Trinity College’, p. 161.

is not certain who fired the shot that killed Gerald. Corporal Finlay McLeod, a New Zealand-born soldier who had spent most of his life in Sydney but had enlisted in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, wrote in a letter to his parents, published in the press:¹³

[A]t 3.30 a.m. three Sinn Feins, an advance party, came riding towards us, and we dropped them. Only another Australian and New Zealander were with me at the time. We were cheered by the OTC, and the officers were pleased with us.

A New Zealand Corporal, John Godwin Garland of Auckland, claimed in a letter to his father, also published in the press, that he was one of four snipers who brought Keogh down.¹⁴ The Australian was Private Michael John McHugh, the Queensland-born son of immigrants from Ireland. A member of the 9th Battalion Australian Imperial Force, he had been evacuated sick from Gallipoli and was on leave in Dublin when the rising broke out. In his letter Garland described other incidents in which the Anzacs were involved. He said that on the Wednesday ‘we got two more in Sackville Street [who] were armed with double-barrelled fowling pieces’. He also described how on the Friday ‘we six Anzacs’ shot and killed two rebel snipers who had been firing on them from the spire of nearby St Andrew’s church.¹⁵ He also wrote:

On Saturday morning we killed a woman who was sniping from an hotel window in Dame Street. When the R.A.M.C. brought her in we saw she was only a girl about 20, stylishly dressed and not at all bad-looking. She was armed with an automatic revolver and a Winchester repeater.

Garland then described how that afternoon ‘the colonials were given the honour of capturing Westland Row station’, in which action, he said, they killed five rebels. Garland went on to claim, ‘Altogether we Anzacs were responsible for 27 rebels (twenty-four men and three women)’. Corporal McLeod claimed an even higher body count. In a letter to his mother, published in the press, he wrote: ‘During [Tuesday] we killed six in one building, 26 in another, and snipers here and there’.¹⁶

The veracity of these claims is highly dubious. In 2015 the Glasnevin Trust published the 1916 Necrology, a list of the names of 485 men, women and children killed during or as a direct result of the rising.¹⁷ That list includes the names of 66 rebels, not counting the 16 leaders who were executed. If Garland’s claim is true, the Anzacs would have been responsible for more than 40 per cent of rebel fatalities, while McLeod’s claim puts the proportion at over 50 per cent, both unlikely propositions given the extent of the fighting throughout the city.

Furthermore, the 1916 Necrology does not include the names of any women rebels among the dead. It is possible that the authorities covered up the deaths of women rebels in order to avoid having to admit that the Crown forces had killed

¹³ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 July 1916, p. 12; *Glen Innes Examiner*, 10 July 1916, p. 3; *Farmer and Settler*, 18 July 1916, p. 2; *Dominion* 12 July 1916, p. 4.

¹⁴ *Auckland Star*, 28 June 1916, p. 8. Garland also claimed that two of the despatch riders were killed, which is not corroborated by other sources.

¹⁵ Sergeant Don also mentioned the duel with the rebels in the St Andrew’s spire (*Bendigo Advertiser*, 9 August 1916, p. 3)

¹⁶ *Dominion*, 12 July 1916, p. 4.

¹⁷ <http://www.glasnevintrust.ie/visit-glasnevin/news/1916-list/>.

women. But that is also unlikely. In the one hundred years since the rising much research has been carried out on Easter week, including the role of women. If the rebel dead included women surely their names would have been discovered by now.¹⁸ The most likely explanation is that Garland and McLeod either deliberately inflated the death toll or were mistaken due to ‘the fog of war’. If neither is the case then a troubling consequence is that the Anzacs may have been responsible for the deaths of some of the 260 civilian men and women whose names are listed in the 1916 Necrology.

Royal Barracks

Dominion troops who had reported to the Royal (now Collins) Barracks joined with soldiers from the Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the fighting along the Liffey quays. There the rebels had seized buildings on both sides of the river impeding the movement into the city of troops from the Royal and Richmond barracks and reinforcements from the Curragh. Ballarat-born Private John Joseph Chapman, with the brevity that characterises his diary, wrote:¹⁹

Given rifle and ammunition and had to fight enemy in the streets. Nearly got hit several times. Only a few casualties on our side.

Corporal Fred Harvey from Burra in South Australia was more effusive in his descriptions of the fighting. In a letter to his parents, published in the press, he said that he, along with a Canadian, two South Africans and two Australians, were ordered to guard and patrol Ellis Street and the lanes running into it:²⁰

Well here the fun began, bullets were going in all directions All went well during the day, but as soon as the darkness approached things began to very get [sic] exciting but though we all had narrow escapes, I was the only one to get hit, but not with a bullet. As I was walking up one of the lanes somebody kindly knocked my hat off with a bottle, but to my disgust did not see which window it came from so, was unable to retaliate.

The next morning Harvey took part in a raid on the Mendicity Institution, held by the rebels under the command of Seán Heuston. He wrote:

A lieutenant took several men across the street and the bombing began. The lieutenant was a great hand at the game and I saw the best bit of bombing I have ever seen.

The raid was successful, resulting in the rebels surrendering this important position. Harvey’s lengthy letter is a tale of derring-do, a ripping yarn of a jolly good time had by all. It concludes with the observation:

Though the affair was indeed very serious, it had, for one who had no relatives in Ireland, its funny parts.

¹⁸ One woman who is sometimes claimed as a rebel woman fatality is Nurse Margaret Keogh, who was shot on the first day of the rising in or near the South Dublin Union while treating a wounded volunteer. The 1916 Necrology lists her as a civilian fatality under the name Margaret Kehoe. For a discussion of her status see <http://comeheretome.com/2016/01/12/a-hero-nonetheless-nurse-margaret-keogh-and-the-easter-rising/>.

¹⁹ Diary of Lieutenant John Joseph Chapman of the 9th Battalion: Australian War Memorial (A.W.M.)1DRL/0197.

²⁰ *Burra Record*, 12 July 1916, p. 4. For a description of the capture of the Mendicity Institution see Michael Foy and Brian Barton, *The Easter Rising* (Sutton Publishing, 1999; paperback edition 2000), p. 180.

He then gave a not particularly funny example.

Portobello Barracks

Portobello (now Cathal Brugha) Barracks was home to the 3rd Reserve Battalion Royal Irish Rifles. As elsewhere it welcomed an influx of sundry British and dominion soldiers, including the Australian officer whose letter to Richard Garland was published in the *Melbourne Age*.

Although the *Age* did not identify the officer, who remained nameless during the controversy that followed in the Australian press, he was in fact Richard Garland's eldest son Charles, who had enlisted in the 2nd Regiment of King Edward's Horse in April 1915 and had served on the Western Front before being posted to the Curragh for officer training.²¹ Richard Garland was a native of Dublin and when Charles was given leave over the Easter weekend, he visited the city and stayed with an uncle. After observing the outbreak of the rising and finding it impossible to return to the Curragh, Charles reported at Portobello Barracks on Tuesday morning.

Queensland's John Oxley Library holds a typescript of Charles' letter among the papers of Canon David John Garland, Richard's brother and reputed founder of Anzac Day.²² So far the original letter has not been located. The typescript version, initially dated Thursday 27 April but with postscripts that extend to Thursday 4 May, is longer than the version printed in the *Age* and there are also differences of wording, some of which are significant. In the letter, Charles described how he participated in a patrol on the Tuesday night to raid a nearby shop suspected of harbouring rebels.²³ The officer leading the patrol was Captain John Bowen-Colthurst. On the way to the shop the patrol encountered three men in Rathmines Road. According to the letter as published in the *Age*:

The captain wanted to know their business, and one answered back, so the captain just knocked him insensible with the butt of his rifle. The other two ran, and one shouted something about 'down with the military', and the captain just shot him dead.

The published letter then describes the raid and the taking of prisoners who were marched back to the barracks, adding:

Two were let go. The three others turned out to be head men of the gang and were shot.

²¹ Although described as an Australian, Charles was born in Canada, where his father Richard Garland was general manager of Dunlop Rubber Co. When Charles was a small child the Garlands moved to Australia, where Richard set up a branch of the company (*Australasian*, 29 November 1919, p. 22).

²² Canon David John Garland Papers, John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland, OM71-51/13. See John A. Moses and George F. Davis, *Anzac Day Origins: Canon D.J. Garland and Trans-Tasman Commemoration* (Canberra: Barton Books, 2013). I am grateful to Marg Powell of the John Oxley Library for bringing the typescript copy of the letter to my attention. Her article is at <http://blogs.slq.qld.gov.au/ww1/2016/03/28/charles-garland-easter-rising-1916/>.

²³ Both versions of the letter give the time of the patrol as 10.30 a.m., but it is clear from the activities preceding the raid that are described in the typescript version that the time should have read 10.30 p.m.

The three men, shot the next morning on the orders of Bowen-Colthurst, were not rebels but journalists, including well-known Dublin eccentric Francis Sheehy-Skeffington.

After initial reluctance, the military authorities eventually court-martialled Colthurst for the murders. On 10 June 1916 he was found guilty, but the court also found him to be insane with the result that he was detained in Broadmoor asylum for the criminally insane at the king’s pleasure.²⁴ After less than two years Colthurst was released and in 1921 he emigrated to Canada.²⁵ In addition to the court martial a royal commission was held under the chairmanship of Sir John Simon from 23-31 August 1916, during the course of which Timothy Healy, counsel for Hannah Sheehy Skeffington (Francis’s widow), tendered the *Age* article that quoted the Australian officer’s letter.²⁶

Garland’s letter also described another patrol in which he and a Canadian soldier raided the home of ‘a Russian Countess, who was a keen rebel’ — presumably Countess Markievicz, second in command of the rebel forces at St Stephen’s Green.²⁷ He wrote:

In town we didn't see a single civilian — just as well for them, as they would have been shot — and the houses had to be in darkness too. One house had a light in the front window, but one of the officers put half a dozen shots into it, and it soon went out.

Following publication of the letter in the *Age*, Catholic newspapers published comments from readers highly critical of the Australian officer’s account. H.A. Meagher wrote to the *Advocate*.²⁸

This reads like an account of rabbit battues that used to be held in the Western District till common humanity objected to them.

A correspondent to the *Tribune* under the pseudonym ‘Innisfail’ wrote:²⁹

As a specimen of cold-blooded atrocity I venture to say that the Hun in his worst alleged excesses has not equalled it. ... The letter of this ‘Australian officer on leave’, which is a disgrace to Australian manhood ... stirs up rebel instincts that I thought had perished.

Innisfail’s hyperbole illustrates the passion which the letter aroused. It would have been even greater had the editor of the *Age* not sanitised it. According to the typescript, the letter actually said ‘the three others turned out to be head men of the gang and so we shot them’, rather than ‘and were shot’.³⁰

²⁴ For details of the court martial see *1916 Rebellion Handbook* (Dublin: Mourne River Press, 1998), pp 108-14. It was originally published in 1916 by the *Weekly Irish Times* as the *Sinn Féin Rebellion Handbook: Easter 1916* (with an augmented edition appearing in 1917).

²⁵ For further information on Bowen-Colthurst see: Bryan Bacon, *A Terrible Duty: The Madness of Captain Bowen-Colthurst* (Thena Press, 2015); James W Taylor, *Guilty but Insane: J.C. Bowen-Colthurst: Villain or Victim?* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2016).

²⁶ *1916 Rebellion Handbook*, pp 213-31.

²⁷ The typescript letter describes her as a ‘Prussian Countess’.

²⁸ *Advocate*, 8 July 1916, p. 23.

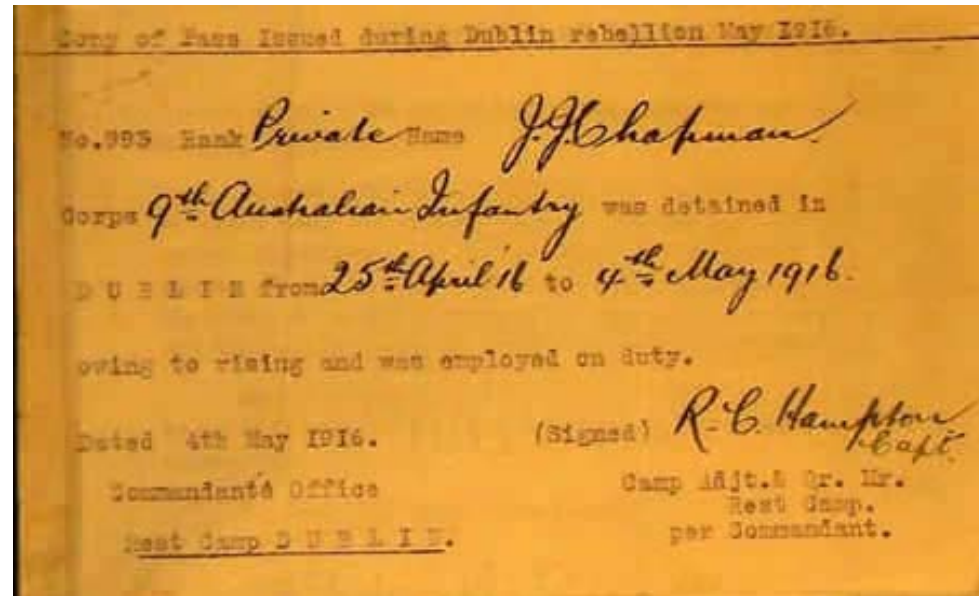
²⁹ *Tribune*, 6 July 1916, p. 4.

³⁰ The words ‘so we shot them’ are ambiguous. They could mean that Garland was a member of the firing squad or that ‘we’ (i.e., the military) shot the journalists, not Garland personally. But it is unlikely that such a fine distinction would have been made by the letter’s critics, particularly as that meaning might better have been conveyed by ‘so they shot them’.

THE SINN FEIN REVOLT.

AUSTRALIAN OFFICER'S EXPERIENCES.

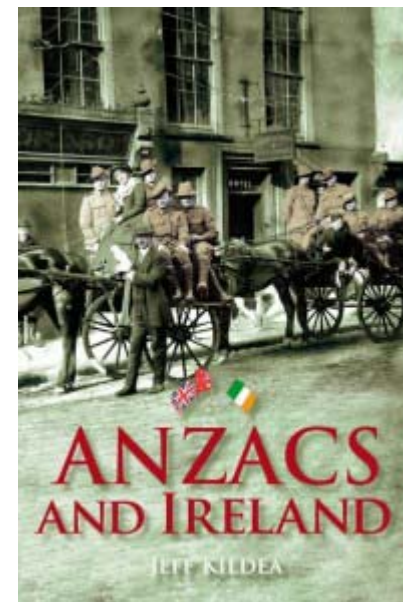
An Australian officer, who while on leave in Ireland took part in suppressing the Sinn Fein rebellion, writes of his experiences in a letter to Mr. R. Garland, chairman of directors of the Dunlop Rubber Co. When the rebellion broke out this officer offered his services. He writes:—
“They called for bombers, and I was turned over to a captain, an enormous man, about 6 feet 4 inches. At 10.30 a.m. we went, with fourteen others, to attack a shop. Martial law had been declared. Near the barracks we saw three men. The captain wanted to know their business, and one answered back, so the captain just knocked him insensible with the butt of his rifle. The other two ran, and one shouted something about ‘down with the military,’ and the captain just shot him dead. When 100 yards away from the suspected shop I advanced alone, with bombs ready. There was a tram in front, and I crept up to it and dashed round, putting in a bomb at short range through the front window. It did a lot of damage, and I then went straight through the window, followed by



[above] Private Chapman's chit explaining his absence.

[left, and continued below] Article from page 11 of the Melbourne Age of 1 July 1916, reproducing Charles Garland's letter to his father. Charles Garland was an officer cadet in the 2nd Regiment of King Edward's Horse.

[right] cover of Jeff Kildea's book, *Anzacs and Ireland* (Cork University Press, 2007)



straight through the window, followed by the others. There was a light showing from a room down stairs. I went down carefully, and told the people there to put up their hands, just allowing them to see a bomb I was holding. This had the right effect, and I went down and found five men and three women. They were marched to the barracks. Two were let go. The three others turned out to be head men of the gang, and were shot. Anyone out after dark was shot. On Thursday night a Canadian and I acted as bombers. In town we didn't see a single civilian—just as well for them, as they would have been shot—and the houses had to be in darkness too. One house had a light in the front window, but one of the officers put half a dozen shots into it, and it soon went out. Our mission was to raid the house of a Russian Countess, who was a keen rebel. The house was empty, and we searched it from top to bottom, finding tons of rebel and incriminating documents. Things are pretty bad outside—no bread at all, as the gas is off, and no mails to England. According to the papers we found, the rebels were in league with the Germans, and were expecting reinforcements of men and food. Troops arrived from England every night, and there must be about 80,000 over now. Dublin is badly smashed."

[*The Irish Sword*, vol. XXXI (no. 123), p. 95]



[above] Anzacs outside Trinity College at the time of the Easter Rising in 1916. The photograph shows two New Zealanders, a South African soldier, and an Australian (believed to be Private Michael McHugh).

[right] Service photograph of Private M. J. McHugh, 9th Battalion, A.I.F.



[left, continued from above] Article from the *Melbourne Age* of 1 July 1916

Sydney's *Catholic Press* joined the chorus of outrage, reproducing the *Age's* article and Innisfail's response, richly sprinkled with sub-headings as if to give editorial endorsement to Innisfail's anger: 'Specimen of Cold-Blooded Atrocity', 'Smashing Brains out of Women and Children', 'Talk of Prussian Militarism', etc.³¹

But it was not only Catholic newspapers and their readers who were outraged. A few months after the rising the socialist activist D.P. Russell published a 95-page pamphlet entitled *Sinn Féin and the Irish Rebellion*. In the preface Russell wrote that his pamphlet was 'an attempt to explain the Irish problem from the standpoint of the class struggle'.³² In it he reproduced the *Age's* version of the letter as well as the exaggerated claims of Corporal John Garland, who does not appear to be related to Charles Garland. Russell added the comment: 'Did Australia's sons in Dublin add lustre to the deeds of the heroes who fought and died in Gallipoli for the "Rights of Small Nations"?'³³

Some Australians were not as critical of the letter as the Catholic newspapers or D.P. Russell. A.T. Saunders wrote to Adelaide's Register expressing his anger at the 'armed band of cowardly assassins [who] suddenly began a murderous attack on innocent and in most cases unarmed men [and] also killed innocent women and children'. Saunders was not referring to Bowen-Colthurst or the soldiers who ran amok in North King Street but to the rebel leaders, whom he described with bitter irony as 'gentle dreamers', adding:³⁴

I am glad to say that some Anzacs had the honour of assisting to put down the 'dreamers'. The Anzacs were in Trinity College, and *Blackwood's Magazine* gives an excellent account of the defence of the college by the Anzacs, the troops, and civilians. One of the 'gentle dreamers' was Mr Sheehy Skeffington, and he was one of [those] who were rightfully shot.

The controversy might have been even greater had it been known at the time that another Australian was involved in the journalists' murder, and in a much more direct way. Like Charles Garland, William Dobbin, a native of Maldon, Victoria, had enlisted in the British Army. He was commissioned into the 3rd Battalion Royal Irish Rifles in June 1915.³⁵ On the morning that Skeffington,

³¹ *Catholic Press*, 13 July 1916, p. 17.

³² Russell was a socialist who stood for election to the federal parliament as a candidate for the Labor Party in 1910 and 1913. In 1910 he lost to Prime Minister Alfred Deakin in the seat of Ballaarat by only 400 votes out of 20,000 after gaining a 15% swing. He also unsuccessfully stood for election to the Victorian parliament in 1911 and 1917. He was one of the six delegates from Victoria at the federal conference of the Labor Party in Hobart in 1912 (*Official Report of the Fifth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party* (Sydney: Worker Trade Union Printery, 1912, p. 5). For an obituary see *Bendigo Advertiser*, 4 December 1918, p. 5.

³³ Russell, *Sinn Féin and the Irish Rebellion*, pp 69-71.

³⁴ *Register*, 30 September 1916, p. 5. Neither Bowen-Colthurst's court martial nor the Royal Commission that later investigated the murders considered Sheehy Skeffington had been 'rightfully shot', with both tribunals finding that the killings were unlawful and the journalists innocent of any involvement in the rising.

³⁵ His father, William Wood Dobbin, was a native of Belfast, who had emigrated to Australia. He managed Nambrok Station, Rosedale, for Dalgety & Co. and served as a magistrate in the local district before going to the Boer War as commander of the 3rd Bushmen's Rifles. After the war Major Dobbin returned to Ireland and was appointed governor of Waterford Prison and later Clonmel Borstal. He was made a member of the Order of the British Empire in 1920. He had

Dickson and McIntyre were shot Dobbin was the officer in charge of the guard room. It was to him that Bowen-Colthurst went demanding that the prisoners be removed from their cells and shot. Although Dobbin acceded to that demand, he did not participate in the firing squad. However, on entering the yard where the men had been shot he noticed Skeffington’s leg moving. He reported this to Bowen-Colthurst who ordered that they be shot again, whereupon Dobbin gave the order to fire.

Questioned at the royal commission as to why he had not protected his prisoners, Dobbin conceded that he did not think that ordering the men to be shot was the right thing for Bowen-Colthurst to have done. His evidence, as a whole, indicates that this 19-year old newly-commissioned 2nd Lieutenant with no experience of battle had been overborne by his 35-year old battle-experienced senior officer.³⁶

Conclusion

Mostly, the newspapers which published reports of the experiences of Anzac soldiers caught up in the Easter rising presented their accounts in an anodyne way as news of what one of the local lads had been doing in the war. Few commented on the appropriateness of their actions. But what do we say in response to Russell’s question?

Certainly, in the first days of the rising the Anzacs made a significant contribution to the efforts of the Crown forces to contain the rebels, especially at Trinity College. But Russell’s question challenges us to look beyond military considerations, to ask how is it that the Anzacs fighting a war for small nations allowed themselves to become involved in the suppression of a nationalist rising. After all, they had enlisted and travelled half way round the world to fight Germans not Irishmen.

In some cases at least the Anzacs had a choice. Corporal Harvey in his letter wrote, ‘Next morning we all paraded and volunteers were asked for. I, of course, in common with all Colonial troops, volunteered and again took up arms to defend the King and country’. One might ask, rhetorically, ‘Which country’?

For Harvey the fighting was an adventure, while Corporal McLeod described it as ‘fun’. But others were unhappy about what they had been ordered to do. Private George Davis recorded in his diary:³⁷

married Emily Josephine Cuzens at Christchurch pro-cathedral Ballarat on 18 March 1885. They had four children before Emily died on 25 January 1900 aged 34 years.

³⁶ *The Times*, 1 September 1916, p. 3. The testimony as reported in *The Times* differs somewhat from that set out in the *1916 Rebellion Handbook*. When the royal commission began, Dobbin had been serving in France with the 2nd Royal Irish Rifles. He was brought back to give evidence to the commission. After giving his evidence Dobbin returned to the Front, where, on 1 January 1918, he was awarded the Military Cross for gallantry. On 23 March 1918 he was killed during the German breakthrough that overran his battalion’s position. Dobbin’s service record is at the National Archives, Kew: WO 339/55777.

³⁷ Diary of Private George Edward Davis: A.W.M., PR88/203. Born in New Zealand, Davis enlisted in the A.I.F. in Victoria.

We were in a very unenviable position, for we personally had no quarrel with the rioters. ... We are making the best of a bad job, but would prefer to be anywhere but in this unenviable city.

Some soldiers may even have refused to serve. New Zealand researcher Hugh Keane has come across a souvenir card of the Manchester Martyrs on which are written the words, 'Bought by Mr Collins NZ Army in Dublin 1916 (refused to report to barracks and fight rebels)'.³⁸

It is easy for us with the benefit of hindsight to regard the rising as embodying the aspirations of the Irish people to govern themselves and therefore to conclude that in opposing the rebels the Anzacs were on the wrong side of history. But in the first flush of the rising few saw it in those terms. Many Irish nationalists in Ireland and Australia regarded the actions of the rebels as treacherous – a threat to the hard-fought campaign for home rule that had all but succeeded. Moreover, in the first days of the rising it was Irish troops who did most of the fighting against the rebels.³⁹ And the Irish regiments serving on the Western Front received the news of the rising and its aftermath without a breakdown of discipline or morale.⁴⁰

Even if the Anzacs did not enjoy doing what they did, they would have seen it as their duty as loyal soldiers of the king. On enlistment they had sworn an oath to 'cause His Majesty's peace to be kept and maintained' and in Ireland during Easter week a band of the king's subjects was in open revolt and threatened that peace. Today we might cringe at such thoughts, but that was then. Attitudes were different. Ingrained in the Anzacs was a strong sense of duty, something that would keep most of them going for the four long years of the war.⁴¹

³⁸ E-mail correspondence with Hugh Keane, who wrote that he has yet to ascertain Mr Collins's identity and the circumstances of his refusal.

³⁹ P.J. Hally, 'The Easter 1916 Rising in Dublin: the Military Aspects', in *Ir. Sword*, vii (No. 29: Winter 1966), pp 313-26; and viii (No. 30: Summer 1967), pp 48-57; Neil Richardson, *According to their Lights: Stories of Irishmen in the British Army, Easter 1916* (Cork: The Collins Press, 2015), ch. 1. Richardson calculates that 35 per cent of the British military fatalities in the rising were Irishmen.

⁴⁰ Timothy Bowman, *Irish Regiments in the Great War: Discipline and Morale* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp 127-9.

⁴¹ 'In the war as a whole, on all sides, most men simply did what they conceived to be their duty. ... The reasons for this lay in their sense of patriotism, duty, honour and deference to authority; all much more important concepts [then] than they are today': John Ellis, *Eye-deep in Hell: The Western Front 1914-18* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 190.