

1916 Irish Hero Gets Dying Wish: Britain Returns Body to Dublin

By Flora Lewis

Washington Post Foreign Service

LONDON, Feb. 23—The British sent Sir Roger Casement home to Dublin today, as he had asked just before they hanged him here at Pentonville Prison in 1916.

"When they have done with me, don't let my bones lie in this dreadful place. Take me back to Ireland and let me lie there," the Irish hero said. Ever since, the Irish have sought the return of his remains.

This afternoon, Prime Minister Harold Wilson announced to the House of Commons that the body was exhumed from its grave of shame in the prison yard Monday night and flown to Dublin today, where government ministers and a 100-man honor guard were on hand. London's agreement and the return of the body were kept secret until the plane had taken off.

No explanation was made for the precaution, but a government spokesman in Dublin said he supposed it was because "some people in England or Ulster (Northern Ireland)

may still have strong feelings. Don't forget the English consider Casement a traitor still. They hanged him as a traitor, you know."

Casement is to lie in state in Dublin for four days and will have a state funeral after a solemn Requiem Mass in Dublin's Roman Catholic Cathedral — though he was a Protestant.

Casement was from the north of Ireland, born in 1864. He entered the British consular service and saw with horror the barbarous conditions imposed on men gathering wild rubber in the Congo and in South America. For his humanitarian exposures of these atrocities, the British knighted him in 1911.

But the same passions for justice stirred in him an ardent Irish nationalism. During the 1916 rebellion, he went to England's enemy — Germany — to seek aid for his compatriots. The Germans brought him back to Ireland secretly, by submarine. He was caught, taken to London, convicted of high treason and hanged.

The trial aroused wild emotions. A world war was being fought, and America was still neutral. The British, needing overseas support, worried gravely about the effect of the

Casement trial on America's sympathies for their own larger cause, for many Americans were staunchly pro-Irish.

That was the reason, partisans have alleged, why Casement was accused of homosexuality and "black diaries" produced to support the charge. The diaries will remain in the archives here.

The Irish say the diaries were forged, but they have made no official demands for their recovery. Officially, Dublin considers the issue utterly irrelevant to the memory of a martyred patriot.

Casement was a big, handsome man, dark-haired and bearded, and his life was adventurous and dashing, the sort of figure to inspire epic poems. Yeats wrote more than once about him, singing his patriotism and bemoaning his burial across the Irish Sea.

In the "Ghost of Roger Casement," he wrote:

I say Roger Casement

Did what he had to do.

He died from the gallows.

But that is nothing new . . .

And in another poem:

Come speak your bit in public

That some amends be made

To this most gallant gentleman

That is in quicklime laid.

At Monday noon, with the solemn pomp of a state ceremony, Casement is to be reburied in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin, where his grave has been waiting since 1925. It was chosen then by his sister, and purchased by an American friend of Casement's, Michael Francis Doyle.

The drama is an epilogue to an era. This year, the government heads of Ulster and Eire have exchanged visits in each others' capitals. The Green and the Orange have met in friendliness, a bit uneasy still, perhaps, because it is a starting of the new. When Casement is lowered into Dublin soil, it will set the old at rest.



Sir Roger

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