

# AOH Div. 7 Historian Report

January 2023

Thank you, worthy President.

January (or Eanáir) marks the 101st anniversary of the signing of the Anglo-Irish Peace Treaty, which eventually led to the Irish Civil War of 1922 to 1923.

The Civil War was the conflict between those in favor of and those against the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The treaty, reached by Britain and Ireland in late 1921, established all but six northern counties of Ireland as the Irish Free State. The treaty also stipulated that Ireland must remain loyal to the British monarch. The Irish leaders who opposed all terms but complete independence from Britain clashed with the Irish leaders who readily accepted the end of bloodshed with Britain for limited independence. These two forces turned upon each other, creating a civil war that led to more than 1,000 deaths.

The Anglo-Irish Treaty was negotiated by representatives of Sinn Féin—most notably Michael Collins—at the direction of Eamonn de Valera and British officials, including Winston Churchill. The treaty did not grant Ireland full independence, however. Twenty-six of the 32 counties of Ireland became the Irish Free State, which would hold dominion status within the British Empire; the remaining six counties, sometimes referred to as the province of Ulster, continued to be part of the United Kingdom.

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In January 1922 the Dáil, (the Irish Legislative body) voted to approve the treaty by a vote of 64 to 57, causing de Valera to resign in protest. Sinn Féin was thus split into two factions; one group supported the treaty under the leadership of Collins, and the other group, the republicans, opposed the treaty under de Valera.

Collins headed a provisional government set up to ease the transition of power from the British to the Irish. In April 1922, however, republican forces took over the Four Courts building in Dublin. Collins, whose pro-treaty allies had just won a majority of seats in the first elections in the Free State, ordered an attack on the anti-Treaty Republicans a few weeks later in June. This was the start of the civil war.

De Valera's Republican forces had more armed men, but had difficulty organizing and developing a plan for defeating the supporters of the treaty. The Free State government was the official government of Ireland, and was able to build up its own army and take control of cities and large towns. The Republicans, who employed guerrilla tactics, were strongest in parts of the counties of Cork, Kerry, Wexford, Mayo, and Sligo.

In August 1922 Collins, who had given up the chairmanship of the provisional government in mid-July to assume command of the army in order to crush the insurgency, was shot to death by anti-treaty insurgents

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in an ambush in west Cork. Although the Free State army had lost one of its most able leaders, most of the people of Ireland still supported the treaty. You may recall that WT Cosgrave was later elected the first President of the Dáil in September 1922. The fighting between the pro- and anti-treaty groups continued off and on for several more months. By its close in May 1923 many leaders in the Irish Republican movement were dead, with 77 official executions of Anti-Treaty Republicans during the war. While this conflict lasted only 10 months, it was to effect Irish politics for the next decade, and lived long in the memory of the Irish people.

After the war, de Valera continued to be active in Irish politics, forming a political party called Fianna Fáil. The party won enough seats in 1932 to become the government of Ireland. Supporters of the Free State formed an opposition party, called Fine Gael, in 1933. These two political parties are still active in Ireland.

I hope you enjoyed these few minutes of Irish history. You may know that I have been learning Irish for the past few years, so I will close with the two short phrases:

Athbhliain faoi mhaise daoibh agus

Go mberirimid beo ar an am seo arís.

Thank you brothers, thank you worthy President.