

Documents on Irish Foreign Policy

Current status and future plans

Dr Michael Kennedy

Volume IV of DIFP, covering March 1932 to December 1936, was published in late October 2004. On 9 November 2004, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Dermot Ahern TD, marked the publication of the volume with a reception, which was attended by about 200 people, in the ballroom at Iveagh House, the headquarters of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The DIFP project is currently completing the research for DIFP volume V; it is hoped that the volume will be published in the winter of 2006. This volume will cover January 1937 to January 1941. It will focus strongly on the Anglo-Irish policies of Eamon de Valera's second, third and fourth administrations, in particular the negotiations leading to the Anglo-Irish Agreements of April 1938. In addition to the usual sources from the Department of Foreign Affairs archive, the volume will contain many documents recently released from de Valera's personal papers.

The volume will cover in detail Ireland's response to the first sixteen months of the Second World War (the war years being known as 'The Emergency' in Ireland). While Ireland appeared studiously neutral in public, in practice the state was strongly pro-Allied and co-operated with the Allies on a wide range of issues from intelligence liaison, through military staff planning, allowing overflights of Allied aircraft, interning captured downed German airmen whilst releasing downed Allied pilots and facilitating over 100,000 Irish men and women to serve in the British war effort. DIFP V will show how, despite Churchill's often expressed desire to invade Ireland and his annoyance at Ireland's neutrality, senior officials in External Affairs and the heads of Irish Military Intelligence (G2) were in continuous contact with their British counterparts.

External Affairs maintained a correct official relationship with the German, Italian and Japanese representatives in Dublin. DIFP V will show the stresses and strains in this relationship. It was well known in Berlin that Taoiseach and Minister for External Affairs, Eamon de Valera had, as he himself put it, 'a certain consideration for Britain' when steering Ireland's course through the Second World War.

Volume V will end in January 1941 during a period of some uncertainty as to German intentions towards Ireland following Dublin's refusal in mid-December 1940 to allow Berlin to fly extra staff into Ireland for the German legation in Dublin¹ Christmas 1940 and New Year 1941 saw pin prick Luftwaffe bombing raids on the Dublin area and Ireland's east coast. These raids were later explained by navigational error and compensation was paid to Dublin by Berlin. However, at the time the German attacks were interpreted as being linked to the refusal to allow the increase in staff at the German legation.

Volume V has presented DIFP with an unusual problem. A large tranche of Department of Foreign Affairs material from January 1938 to May 1940 was confidentially destroyed on 25 May 1940 on the orders of Eamon de Valera because it was expected that Ireland would soon be invaded by Germany. As a result, many files of sensitive documents were destroyed. Considerable gaps exist in the series of confidential reports from missions abroad and in the series of top-secret Secretary's Office files for the immediate pre-Second World War years.

Starting from the original registers of documents, which thankfully were not destroyed, DIFP set out to find out just what had been destroyed and if copies could be located from other collections. It appears that rumours of widespread destruction were untrue, a mere 90 files were destroyed, but within these 90 files were twelve files containing approximately 450 confidential reports from January 1938 to May 1940 from the missions in Paris, Berlin, London, Washington, Rome, the Vatican and the League of Nations and Irish consulates in the United States. The destruction of these documents represents a huge loss for research into Irish foreign policy in the last days of peace and the first nine months of the second world war. We have been able to find copies of the confidential reports for the Paris, Madrid and Rome legations, and some reports from the Vatican, but replacement copies of reports from Berlin, London, Geneva and Washington have not been located.² However, DIFP will be able to list the names and numbers of the files that were destroyed, what material they contained and whether copies still exist. We will publish this research as an appendix to DIFP V.

DIFP continues to be based in the Special Projects Unit at the National Archives in Dublin, where it has been located since the summer of 2003. Project staff numbers remain

¹ These staff were in fact military officials in civilian guise.

² The Berlin legation was destroyed in an air raid in November 1943, the papers of the London High Commissioner's office were destroyed through water damage in the mid-1950s, the Geneva legation files were weeded by the Permanent Representative to the League in 1940 fearing a German invasion of Switzerland and the Washington Embassy files were weeded at an unknown date.

at two (executive editor, editorial assistant). A new post of assistant editor will come on stream in 2006. The project has been making considerable use of university students on work placement with the National Archives as temporary part-time staff. In particular, they have been tasked with the digital photography of documents for consideration for inclusion in DIFP volumes.

For volume V, DIFP has moved entirely to the digital capture and tagging of documents and has stopped photocopying the selection of documents for consideration for inclusion in volumes. The new system is much less time consuming and less cumbersome to work with. The project's main work tools are now a database containing the details of documents for selection and a searchable photodatabase where document images are stored, referenced chronologically and tagged with details regarding their topic, contents and date.

