



"It will, therefore, be understood that when the Leprechauns of Gort na Cloca Mora acted in the manner about to be recorded, they were not prompted by any lewd passion for revenge, but were merely striving to reconstruct a rhythm which was their very existence, and which must have been of direct importance to the Earth."

—The Crook of Gold by James Stephens

ABOUT THE AUTHOR . . .

GEORGE TILDEN ORICK writes: "The feeling of being Irish (my mother's forebears were Leonards and Kenefics) is difficult to explain to the more stolid 99 percent of the world's people. Even so, I hope I have done justice to the Fenian Brotherhood. Either you believe in Leprechauns or you don't. Of more pedestrian interest in establishing my qualifications to interpret the Fenians, it might be told that I have worked as a newspaperman, magazine writer, and editor, public relations operative, planner of political campaigns and meddler in the internal affairs of wayward trade unions."

A talent for successful rebellion cannot be said to be one of the notable characteristics of the Irish. Romantic by nature, delighted by the concept of secrecy but incapable of sustaining it, self-infecting to the point of being self-delusory, the Irish have been shown by history to be among the world's less dangerous revolutionists.

There has been no lack of opportunity for effective revolt in the nearly eight hundred years during which Ireland was subjected, with varying degrees of harshness, to English rule.

The ingredients of a successful revolt are motivation, timing, broad support, availability of weapons, and grim execution of a good plan. During the Civil War in the United States and for a decade afterward, the Irish, both in this country and in their homeland, were favored by an almost ideal conjunction of these ingredients. Only one was lacking: grim execution of a good plan.

There was motivation in abundance: Relentless English oppression and the potato famine had reduced Ireland to unbearable poverty and degradation. The timing was perfect: Tens of thousands of Irish-Americans, trained and toughened in the Civil War, were pledged to the liberation of their native sod, and relations between England and the United States were cold as a result of England's sympathy with the Confederacy. Support was general, and it was intense: The Irish in America, who between 1848 and 1864 had sent their former countrymen \$65 million to relieve starvation and poverty, were willing to support an armed revolt against England with still more millions. Weapons to supplement the pikes and reaping hooks of Ireland's peasantry were available in this country through military surplus channels and from the commercial armorers of the Northern forces.

There was a plan, yes, and there was execution of it. Whether or not the plan was good is arguable; at the time it must certainly have appeared sound, if only in terms of its ambitiousness and the hard-cash support it attracted. But execution of the plan was neither grim nor sustained.

The plan simply was the invasion and occupation of Canada by the Irish in the United States, and the subsequent use of Canada either as a lever in negotiations with England to free Ireland, or as a base from which to seize Ireland by force.

This scheme was devised by the Fenian Brotherhood, organized in the United States just before the Civil War under the leadership of John O'Mahony, a youthful Irish immigrant who in 1848 had induced fifteen hundred Irish peasants to cluster in sullen and purposeless revolt on a hilltop on his family's ancestral land in Tipperary. After three weeks all were driven off by the British, and O'Mahony left for America. His inspirational guide in establishing the Fenian Brotherhood was a dedicated revolutionary, James Stephens, leader of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Stephens came to America from time to time to act as sort of consultant to the Fenians, and to assist them in channeling their revolutionary zeal toward the support of his IRB.

At first O'Mahony and Stephens agreed that the most direct, and therefore the most obvious, course of action was the seizure of Ireland by an Irish army from America. The invasion was to be accompanied by furious guerrilla activity in Ireland.

Immediately after the Civil War the Fenians, now several thousand in number, sent a ship Erin's Hope to Ireland laden with rifles and ammunition to be used during the civil insurrection accompanying the Fenian invasion. The Hope was blanketed just short of the Irish coast by the British Navy. Re-examination of the direct, obvious plan for the invasion of Ireland began in the Fenian councils.

The Fenian Brotherhood was a strange contrivance, wondrous in its paradoxes. It was both democratic and totalitarian. The former because it was a government, with its capital on Union Square in New York until it could be installed in Dublin, the latter because it was a revolutionary organization whose principal impulse was martial. It was the most public secret in its time: The members of its circles (cells) across the nation were protected from the possibility of betraying their brotherhood by being given only fragments of information, but the Fenians' master plans, argued and amended with public passion in meetings of the brotherhood's senate, were reported in detail in the American press. The Fenians were, in a way, a vast social club with an army which was supported and equipped through the sale of war bonds of denomination exceeding small and through contributions obtained in return for cheap whiskey and conviviality at giant picnics and balls in nearly every city and big town in the country.

There was a distinctly unreal quality about the Fenian Brotherhood. A government with no country to govern, with a trained and experienced army, it was committed to making war on a world power from within a country of which most of the brotherhood were citizens and which had just concluded a bloody civil war. Existence of such an organization had to be entirely a matter of belief in the minds of its members, and the Irish in America gave it such belief.

The very name of the brotherhood was a tribute to the Irish ability to sustain romantic legend. Discouraged by the Catholic church from learning to read and write for more than a hundred years, the Irish peasantry had kept their history alive by storytelling, and the legend of the Fenians seemed appropriate when the brotherhood was searching for a name.

The Fenians, sons of Fionn, an ancient warrior, were an elite militia who guarded the coast of Ireland a thousand years ago. They were gentlemen in the truest sense, and they were superior fighters. To qualify for service, the Fenian of old was required to swear that he would seek a wife for her virtue and good manners and not for her fortune, that he would never do violence to a woman, and that he would never avoid a fight unless the enemy odds against him were greater than nine to one. The candidate was then subjected to a spear attack by nine Fenians, and if he survived this he was made to demonstrate that he could evade capture in the woods pursued by a large number of Fenians. And he must be able to take a thorn from his foot while running at top speed through the forest, without slowing his pace.

Re-examination of the plan for a direct invasion of Ireland plunged Fenian leaders into their first power struggle. O'Mahony was defeated and was deposed as president by the senate in favor of William R. Roberts, a wealthy New York dry-goods dealer. Robert's plan was infinitely more appealing to the senate: he thought an invasion of Canada would make the best use of the Fenian forces and would be the surest method of freeing Ireland. He was supported by his Secretary of War, General Tom Sweeny, an old Indian fighter who had lost an arm in the Mexican War and who had served the North in the Civil War.

"Let us march on the frontiers," Roberts proclaimed. "The government of Canada is imbecile. The capital can easily be taken by a handful of Fenians, who can throw up works and hold it against any force the Canadian government is prepared to send against them until reinforced. What a thrilling effect such an achievement would have throughout Europe. We must go to Canada and fight it out there."

This sort of thinking by Roberts, however stimulating, was rudimentary. No Irishmen, plotting aggression, could let such modest aims go unembellished.

And so the plans grew. The rationale was airtight: "Canada is a province of Great Britain; the English flag floats over it and English soldiers protect it, and . . . wherever the English flag and English soldiers are found, Irishmen have a right to attack."

Roberts and Sweeny went on the road to inflame the Fenians. In the Great Lakes cities there was wild enthusiasm, in Philadelphia, St. Louis, San Francisco, and other cities not on the Canadian frontier there was hearty support, and above all there was money. Subscriptions were rolling in at the rate of \$15,000 a day, three regiments were drilling nightly in Buffalo, and arms and ammunition were being accumulated to equip tens of thousands of troops.

The Fenians' capacity for believing their fantasies appeared infinite. America was indeed the land of opportunity: A revolt plotted in the old country had to be conceived in terms of small groups, rudimentary weapons. Here the Irish could think big. There was money, time, and a congenial environment. The green and gold uniforms of the Irish Republican Army were worn on the streets of New York, and the green flag of the Republic billowed over Union Square. And weapons could be acquired and stockpiled. In fact at least one of the Fenian leaders, P. J. Meehan, editor of the magazine New Ireland (which was to be the name given to Canada), was a major stockholder in a firm which transformed tens of thousands of Civil War muzzle-loading Springfield rifles to breech-loaders.

It might be conjectured that the perquisites and glory available to those who rose to power among the Fenians had become goals in themselves, or that money to be made in equipping an army was sufficient motivation to effect the creation of an army. But there appeared to have been few doubters among the rank and file of the brotherhood.

In March, 1866, the full plan for the invasion of Canada was released from Fenian headquarters. It was awesome.

In Canada there was alarm. Ten thousand militiamen of the volunteer force were called out to defend Canada's border. Fourteen thousand responded. The Fenian attack was expected to begin on March 17, St. Patrick's day. This proved to be a miscalculation of Irish intentions, and when no attack occurred, the volunteers were released from duty.

Again the Irish capacity for self-delusion warped the vision of Fenian leaders. The rapid and effective response of Canadian volunteers — 40 per cent more than were requested — might have been interpreted as a serious warning by more realistic war makers. But the Irish preoccupation for nearly a thousand years had been more with the plotting of revolt than with its inexorable execution, and the Fenians, however much grander the scale on which they plotted, were fully predisposed as their forebears to dissipate their rebellious urge in mischief. The Irish are not a vengeful people.

The United States government seemed strangely permissive toward the Fenians. This did not surprise the Fenians. They had powerful friends in Congress; the Irish had ascended to get great political power in America's cities, and a grateful federal government remembered the valiant contribution of Irish troops in the Civil War. There was talk among the Fenian leadership of turning both Canada and Ireland over to the United States once they were occupied by the Irish Republican Army.

The Fenian Brotherhood, in its war councils, irrevocably set the first week of June, 1866, for the execution of its invasion plan. Rifles and ammunition were moved in great volume to Buffalo and Malone, New York, and to St. Albans, Vermont. Recruiting was intensified, and during the last week of May thousands of Fenians, some of them carrying rifles, began to move by railroad toward the Canadian border from Eastern and Midwestern cities. They explained to anyone who asked them that they were going to California to look for work in the mines.

Buffalo was the most logical point for the Fenians to concentrate their troops: Several thousand young men could be accommodated with some secrecy by a large city — so reasoned the galaxy of self-appointed generals in their New York headquarters — whereas the smaller communities and open countryside along the border would invite public disclosure of such force as was contemplated for the invasion. Of course, everyone, including the New York press knew what the Irish army was up to anyway. There is no one so obvious as an Irishman with a secret. Still, there was no effort by American government officials to prevent violation of the neutrality of the Canadian border.

The nights of May 30 and 31 were wild ones in Buffalo. Thousands of Fenians rallied at the brotherhood's headquarters hotel, and those who could crowd inside were invited to select their farms from large maps of acres of Canada. The youthful troops chanted their song: "We are a Fenian Brotherhood, skilled in the arts of war. And we're going to fight for Ireland, the land that we adore. Many battles we have won, along with the boys in blue. And we'll go and capture Canada, for we've nothing else to do."

In ordinary armies, general officers achieve their rank by one of three courses: They move slowly upward through the ranks until generals above them are removed by death's shadow or by its penumbra retirement; they are needed in comparative profusion to bring direction and proper perspective to an army vastly

# ON TO CANADA

By George Tilden Orick

## An Intimate Look at Gen. John O'Neill and his Fenian followers prior to and during their invasion of Irish Republican Army reprinted on this day to remind us of our Irish forebears, Fenian or other in this campaign prior to settling in O'Neill.

swollen by the requirements of, say, war; or they manifest truly astounding ability that in rare instances cannot be denied.

But the Fenians were not an ordinary army. It is understandable that its first generals, like Tom Sweeny, simply appointed themselves; after all it was fitting that a brand-new army be filled from the top down.

One general, John O'Neill, attained his grade in a manner typical of Fenian military practice. He rose by default. When he reached Buffalo from Nashville with his 116 men on the morning of May 30, he was a colonel. By nightfall of the thirty-first, with the invasion of Canada just a few hours away, he still had been unable to find any of the Fenian generals who in past months had been so noisily determined to lead their troops across the border. In fact, O'Neill turned out to be the senior officer in Buffalo. He took command of the forces of liberation and in doing so became a general. This once, the Fenian promotion-by-vacuum system found a good man.

John O'Neill was the kind of revolutionary leader who has been both the inspiration and the despair of the Irish for centuries. He was the best of a type — a military man of considerable intelligence, quiet courage, and courteous manner. And he was a persuasive leader. A strange mutant among the mass of Irish rebels, O'Neill believed that the language of outrage spoken by his oppressed race could be translated into sustained and purposeful action. And he believed that war bonds bought meant war to be made. Had he been in Ireland in 1866, John O'Neill would have whispered treason with the best of them in a Dublin pub and then, while the others were having another and yet another drink to their oath of revolt, he would have gone out into the dark either to attempt alone the mission of a group or to go to bed feeling that this somehow wasn't the night for it after all.

O'Neill had been ordered from Nashville to take part in the invasion of Canada. Of course, he had heard that the leaders of the brotherhood in New York and Chicago used their position to advance their business and political careers; he had heard that less than one tenth of \$15 million contributed by Irish-American laborers to support an insurrection in the homeland had ever reached Ireland. But he did not, then, know much about such matters as high overhead and the elusive economics of fundraising. His leaders cursed the English and publicly pledged their very lives to the cause of Irish Independence, and that was enough for him, for that was exactly what he was doing, if more quietly. Since the end of the Civil War, Colonel O'Neill had been operating a pension agency in Nashville, keeping in regular communication with the veterans he would lead to Canada. During the war he had commanded a specially trained group of Union guerillas and had later commanded a regiment of Negroes, the 17th United States Colored Infantry.

Now, at thirty-two, John O'Neill was a general (later to be officially confirmed as such), preparing without comprehensible orders and without maps to lead an invasion force into Canada. Of the generals he was probably most like the ancient Fenian prototype, and his assault on Canada was certainly the only military action in a dozen years of Fenian uproar that conformed in any way to the ancient ideals of courage and honor.

Toward midnight of May 31 some 1,000 Fenian troops, of the several thousand in Buffalo, assembled at headquarters. Roughly 200 proved to be too drunk to go farther. The more dedicated 800 dispersed and straggled in small groups by separate but parallel routes to Black Rock, just north of Buffalo. On the way, about 200 more had become drunk and could not continue, but they wished their comrades well. At Pratt's Furnace, the remaining 600 embarked, with nine wagons of rifles and ammunition, on two barges. These were pulled across the Niagara River by a towboat owned by a Buffalo Fenian. When they crossed the centerline of the river, Canada had been invaded.

The Fenian force made its landing cheering, at about 3 o'clock in the morning of June 1 in the yard of a farmhouse occupied by a Mrs. Anderson, who was mighty perplexed. Arms were distributed and pickets were thrown out to guard the beachhead. Then General O'Neill and a sizable detachment of Fenians marched to the village of Fort Erie, about one mile south of the beachhead. They awakened the village and sought out Dr. Kempson, the reeve. A dawn meeting of the municipal council was called, at which O'Neill demanded food for his men and as many horses as could be obtained from the immediate countryside. Ample food and a dozen or so horses were provided.

Then, his men having breakfasted, O'Neill sent a small force west along the Grand Trunk Railroad to destroy bridges and, presumably, to seize whatever rolling stock could be found. These men barely missed an opportunity to capture nearly all of the rolling stock in that section of the Grand Trunk, for a long train had been made up during the early morning hours by frightened railroaders and was hauled toward safety, as the Fenians watched. The train never reached its haven, nor were its four locomotives and half a hundred cars of use to the Fenians. A few miles west of Fort Erie a derailment spilled most of the cars along the right of way.

The main body of Fenians withdrew toward the north from Fort Erie and encamped on Mr. Newbigging's farm at Frenchman's Creek. It was a bright warm day, this first one on Canadian soil, and the invaders, in soldierly reflex, used it well. While small parties poked through the countryside in all directions, seizing horses for later scouting purposes, other Fenians dismantled Mr. Newbigging's rail fences and reassembled the components into neat breastworks. Nearly all of O'Neill's troops were veterans of many World War battles and were thoroughly experienced in the transformation of farmland into battleground.

But also, they were members of the Irish Republican Army, and by early afternoon most of them were drunk and asleep. General O'Neill and his small staff of officers, wearing their blue Union uniforms, spent their afternoon answering a number of

questions: Where were they, why were they here, and why would they do next?

The Fenian invasion had been accomplished as a most logical place on the border. Within twenty miles of the sleeping Irish troops was the Welland Canal, undefended and inviting either capture or destruction. The wrecking of its locks would have closed Canada's water route from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario and would have forced the diversion of a great deal of shipping to the Erie Canal, to the economic disadvantage of Canada. O'Neill could have accomplished this mission — for which an elaborate Fenian rationale could probably have been devised — on the first day of his invasion simply by marching north along the Niagara River west along the Welland River until he reached the canal. At all times his right flank would have been protected by the two rivers.

Or it is possible that O'Neill's force was meant to establish a beachhead through which a vast army of Fenians would flow in Canada, accomplishing a major penetration which could have led to Fenian occupation of all of upper Canada. After all, such was the avowed aim of the brotherhood. Again, the Niagara frontier was ideally chosen, for in addition to the movement which could have resulted in the seizure of the Welland Canal, a simultaneous march westward from Fort Erie, along the Grand Trunk Railroad, could have given the Fenians control of strategically useful square of Canadian land enclosed by the Niagara River, Lake Erie, the Welland Canal, and the Welland River. And the Fenian rear would have been protected by the Niagara River and Lake Erie. Clearly, O'Neill had too few troops to accomplish this latter purpose. In order to hold his beachhead he needed reinforcements, and in order to carry out a major occupation of Canada he needed several divisions.

He got neither. For one thing most of the Fenian soldiers preferred to remain roistering in Buffalo. For another, the United States government had taken a stand. While Mr. Newbigging was marvelling at the minuscule army in his woodlot, the Irish recruits in Buffalo were being informed that under federal fiat they should not, must not violate the neutrality of the Canadian border. And Revenue cutters patrolled the Niagara River to enforce the order.

Meanwhile, Canada was taking swift, orderly steps to protect its lands. Dr. Kempson had notified Toronto of the invasion just before the Fenians pulled down the telegraph wires from Fort Erie. Four hundred men of the Queen's Own Rifles, ready the night before at Toronto in response to reports of the secret Fenian doings in Buffalo, moved by steamer and by the Welland Railway to Port Colborne to await reinforcements. The great portion of the Volunteer Force of Western Canada was ordered to active service by mid-morning of the day of invasion, and by noon a number of units were moving toward the trouble spot.

Colonel George Peacock was given command of the force assigned to the Niagara frontier. He had a battery of Royal Artillery, seven assorted companies of Volunteers, the Queen's Own by now in Port Colborne, and the 13th Battalion of the Hamilton Volunteers. The battalion was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel A. Booker, who was directed to join, and command the Queen's Own at Port Colborne. Booker was also given a couple of platoons of the York and Caledonia Rifles. In all Booker had about 800 men at Port Colborne. Peacock was moving toward Chippewa, about ten miles north of the Fenian encampment, with a force of about 1,200 men. From reports from farmers, Peacock estimated the Fenian force at about 1,500 men, and he anticipated that the would be heavily reinforced by the time he reached Chippewa. Accordingly, he ordered Booker to hold at Port Colborne, about twelve miles west of the Fenians, until a suitable plan for joining force could be devised. Colonel Peacock was a British regular, a Lieutenant Colonel Booker was a clerical officer of the Canadian home guard. Neither had seen active service, but both were well trained and were, moreover, reliable men of reasonable judgment.

Peacock's purpose was clear: He must protect the Welland Canal and either destroy the Fenians or drive them out of Canada. His intention to join forces with Booker was sensible, for by doing so at some point between Chippewa and Port Colborne he could interpose his strength between the Irish and the canal and confine O'Neill's troops in the locality of Fort Erie, a position from which O'Neill must either fight or retreat. Or surrender.

But there were problems, and these equalized the odds again. O'Neill, Peacock, too, was on unfamiliar ground, and he had worse than no map. He had only a postal map, which was preoccupied with the location of dwellings and their interconnection by postal routes. It showed him neither topography nor the true extent of roads. And he had no cavalry and consequently no mounted scouts. His intelligence was poor, for he had to rely on conflicting information from excited civilians. In addition, his men had never been in combat.

Peacock decided that he and Booker would join forces the following day, June 2, at Stevensville, a crossroads community about midway between Chippewa and Port Colborne.

In order to so instruct Booker, Peacock briefed one of his officers, Captain Charles S. Akers, in some detail and sent him mounted, off to Port Colborne. The plan was explicit: Both forces would begin marching toward each other in the morning, after dawn breakfast, and would meet at Stevensville shortly before noon. By averaging out the reports of his civilian scouts, Peacock had concluded, correctly, that the Fenians were at Frenchman's Creek. Anticipating that they might move during the night and knowing not where, he directed Akers to guide Booker to the rendezvous by a route designed to keep him clear of O'Neill. Akers, as things turned out, was the wrong man for the job.

Put two armed forces, who have been described to each other as enemies, on an uncharted patch of the planet, and they will somehow find each other and fight. As Akers was loping toward

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