

## Remilitarising the Connaught Rangers Mutiny

**Key Words:** British Army; Officers; First World War; Imperial Commitments; Demobilisation.

The history of the Connaught Rangers Mutiny has, in many ways, lost its sense of perspective. Studies, particularly of the vintage variety, have either tended to be too narrow in focus, too emotionally-charged, or too subsumed into an exclusively Irish historical context.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, they have often overlooked some of the subject's more obvious points: namely; the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Connaught Rangers was a military unit within the British Army; it was on imperial service at a time of great human, materiel, and financial strain; and, it mutinied primarily on account of a breakdown in officer-man relations. To take this out of its rightful context of Anglo-Indian relations, the position of the army in India, the political tensions in Ireland, and the subsequent appropriation of the mutiny into a Nationalist narrative, would be to ignore equally important elements of the event's history. Such considerations have formed the basis of a grand corpus of work, which will only be enriched by the variety of contributions in this volume.<sup>2</sup> Still, with regard to the military component, there is a longer-durée approach that is well worth undertaking in explaining the events of June/July 1920. Whereas most studies seek to explain the mutiny within the chronological bounds of that fateful year – perhaps stretching their focus back to 1919 to explain the enlistment of some of its key actors (notably, James Daly) – the causes of the mutiny can largely be found in the regiment's Great War experience and the turbulence surrounding the process of demobilisation.<sup>3</sup> By the same token, the period from 1920 until the disbandment of the southern Irish regiments in 1922 is equally instructive but rarely considered. By examining the Connaught Rangers Mutiny within its military context from 1914-1922, this chapter will draw these three strands together to remilitarise a narrative that has all-too-often been overshadowed by the political dimension.

The Connaught Rangers' wartime experience varied significantly between battalions. Upon the outbreak of war, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was stationed in Ferozepore, India, from where it deployed to France as part of the Indian Corps, which did not arrive in Europe

---

<sup>1</sup> Sam Pollock, *Mutiny for the Cause*, (London: Leo Cooper Ltd, 1969); & T.P. Kilfeather, *The Connaught Rangers* (Dublin: Anvil Books Ltd, 1969).

<sup>2</sup> See for instance, Keith Jeffery, "The Irish military tradition and the British Empire", in *'An Irish Empire'? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire*, ed. Keith Jeffrey (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996): 94-122; Michael Silvestri, "The Sinn Fein of India": Irish Nationalism and the Policing of Revolutionary Terrorism in Bengal," *Journal of British Studies* 39 no. 4 (2000): 454-486; Michael Silvestri, *Ireland and India: Nationalism, Empire and Memory*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); & Jane Ohlmeyer, "Ireland, India and the British Empire," *Studies in People's History* 2 no. 2 (2015): 179-180

<sup>3</sup> Among those to consider the refitting of the regiment in 1919 are Anthony Babington, *The Devil to Pay: The Mutiny of the Connaught Rangers, India, July, 1920*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1991); & Thomas Bartlett, "The Connaught Rangers Mutiny India, July 1920," *History Ireland* 6, no. 1 (1998).

until September/October 1914. By contrast, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, which had mobilized from its base at Aldershot as part of the British Expeditionary Force, was caught up in serious fighting almost immediately during the retreat from Mons: its only engagement of the war before being amalgamated with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion.<sup>4</sup> This unit left France in December 1915, seeing further service in Mesopotamia and Palestine. Meanwhile the 3<sup>rd</sup> (Reserve) and 4<sup>th</sup> (Special Reserve) Battalions rotated throughout Ireland and the United Kingdom, serving as draft-finding and training units. The two other formations to see action were the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalions formed in August and September 1914, respectively. The former landed at Anzac Cove on 5 August 1915 during the botched Gallipoli campaign, rotating through Salonika, Egypt, and Palestine before seeing out the war in France from July 1918 onwards. The 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion, by contrast, saw all of its action on the Western Front until it was disbanded in August 1918, following terrible casualties and transfers during, and as a result of, the German Spring Offensives.<sup>5</sup>

The Connaught Rangers' record of service is not insignificant when considering the mutiny in 1920, for in its geographically diverse campaigns can be found the root cause of the breakdown in officer-man relations. This does not relate to the issues concerning the dissolution of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, but rather to the obvious fact that the experience of war differed markedly between the Regular and Service battalions. Following their initial deployment to France in 1914 and 1915, the former saw out the rest of the war in the less intense theatres of the Middle East, avoiding the bloodletting of Gallipoli, the Somme, and the Spring Offensives, which devastated the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Battalions.<sup>6</sup> Not only did this make officer-man relations difficult to sustain during the war but equally tough thereafter. As David Englander has noted, the rapid expansion of the army coupled with the intensity of the industrialised battlefield altered this formerly sacrosanct hierarchical dynamic. Soldiers became keen judges of officer performance and found that their obedience, although unconditional, was somewhat negotiable, leading to greater flexibility as more officers were commissioned on a temporary basis.<sup>7</sup> Service battalions, as well as those Regular units to suffer a high turnover of personnel, became somewhat more democratic in ethos than their relatively unscathed Regular counterparts. However, come war's end, the majority of officers retained by the Connaught Rangers were pre-war Regular officers;

---

<sup>4</sup> Sam Pollock, *Mutiny for the Cause*, (London: Leo Cooper Ltd, 1969); & T.P. Kilfeather, *The Connaught Rangers* (Dublin: Anvil Books Ltd, 1969).

<sup>5</sup> For details of service see, H.F.N. Jourdain and E. Fraser, *The Connaught Rangers*, 3 vols, (London, 1926).

<sup>6</sup> Jonathon Walker ed., *War Letters to a Wife: France and Flanders, 1915-1919* (London: Medici Society Ltd, 1929), 119; & Jourdain and Fraser, *The Connaught Rangers* vol. 3, 81.

<sup>7</sup> David Englander, "Discipline and Morale in the British Army, 1917-1918," in *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, ed. John Horne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), The pre-war British officer corps numbered approximately 12,738 regulars, 2,557 on the Special Reserve and a further 3,202 in the Reserve of Officers; a relatively small number which by the end of the First World War had been supplemented by some 229,316 combatant commissions. See, Keith Simpson, "The Officers" in *A Nation In Arms: The British Army in the First World War*, ed. Ian F.W. Beckett and Keith Simpson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 64.

many from the amalgamated 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion whose war experience and expectations of soldiering has not undergone any radical transformation.

To highlight this point further, it is worth comparing the wartime compositional changes undergone by the Connaught Rangers' Regular and Service battalions' officer corps. As might be expected, Table 1 indicates that the Regular battalions, in 1914, comprised a large proportion of officers hailing from what might be termed a 'typical' background (i.e. the landed classes, whose second and third sons often took up posts in the army or the clergy). Despite minor fluctuations on account of casualties and transfers, the newly amalgamated 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion retained much the same social composition by war's end – albeit with a few more officers hailing from artisanal backgrounds. By contrast,

| Profession           | Regular Battalions |       |       | Service Battalions |       |       |
|----------------------|--------------------|-------|-------|--------------------|-------|-------|
|                      | 1914               | 1916  | 1918  | 1914               | 1916  | 1918  |
| <b>Gentlemen</b>     | 9.5%               | 10.5% | -     | 22.2%              | 10.7% | 5.9%  |
| <b>Military</b>      | 33.3%              | 26.3% | 35.7% | 11.1%              | 3.6%  | -     |
| <b>Clergy</b>        | 14.3%              | 15.8% | 14.3% | 33.3%              | 7.1%  | 5.9%  |
| <b>Professionals</b> | 28.6 %             | 31.6% | 28.6% | 33.4%              | 46.4% | 58.9% |
| <b>Artisans</b>      | 9.5%               | 5.3%  | 14.3% | -                  | 21.4% | 11.8% |
| <b>Other</b>         | 4.8%               | 10.5% | 7.1%  | -                  | 10.8% | 17.5% |

Table 1: Occupations of officers and/or their fathers as stated upon enlistment between 1914 and 1918.<sup>8</sup>

the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalions witnessed greater upheaval on account of their higher casualty rates from 1915 onwards. Despite drawing their initial officer cadres from amongst the same social categories as the Regular battalions in 1914 – a result of both the strength of the Officer Training Corps (OTCs) and the response to Lord Kitchener's call – their 1916 and 1918 compositions reflect a broader middle-class and 'temporary gentleman' influx to fill the gaps. Much the same process can be observed in other New Army battalions.<sup>9</sup>

The constant turnover of officers as a result of casualties did not help foster a sense of regimental identity, which itself was in turmoil over decisions taken to refuse commissions to Irish, Catholic officers. There is much controversy and debate surrounding the numbers of Irish Catholics in the Connaught Rangers during the First World War as the Nationalist camp, the War Office, and Unionists all had differing agendas for quoting figures on this matter in a broader Irish context. Some estimates, such as by Bryan Cooper,

<sup>8</sup> All figures of the Connaught Rangers officers, unless otherwise stated, are drawn from a database covering a sample of 103 officers whose service records survive. This was mainly compiled from the officer service records at The National Archives, Kew (TNA) in the WO 339 and WO 374 series, as well as information gleaned from the Imperial War Museum Sound Archive (IWMSA) 11214: Recorded interview with F.W.S. Jourdain; obituaries found in the National Army Museum (NAM) 1992-04-153, Papers of 2/Lt Alan Young McPeake, Connaught Rangers, last editor of *The Ranger*; as well as marriage notices in *The Times* between 1914 and 1918. Note, some categories in the documents consulted were not filled in or present, as such figures quoted are often a sample of a sample.

<sup>9</sup> Timothy Bowman, "Officering Kitchener's Armies: A Case Study of the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division," *War in History* 16, vol. 2 (2009): 189-212.

have the officers of the 10<sup>th</sup> Irish Division, upon landing in Gallipoli, down as 90% Irish; with C.A. Brett, Lieutenant in the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, similarly noting that ‘about 95% of the officers and men were Roman Catholic’.<sup>10</sup> Conversely, Terence Denman has reiterated the opinion that 85% of the officers in the Connaught Rangers and Munster Fusiliers, even the 16<sup>th</sup> Irish Division as a whole, were Unionist and Protestant.<sup>11</sup> F.W.S. Jourdain, nephew of the CO of the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, noted in an interview that, at mess, religion could not be discussed as it was a mixed regiment of both denominations.<sup>12</sup> Of the small proportion of men whose religion is accurately discernible, it would appear that, in 1914, the Connaught Rangers consisted of a heavily dominant Protestant majority amongst its officers, accounting for some 81.3%. By 1916, however, the Catholic minority of 18.7% had risen dramatically to 47.4%, retaining roughly the same religious composition for the remainder of the war. It is also interesting to note that, as of 1916, both Regular and Service battalions mirrored each other in this respect despite the fact that the latter were raised specifically as Irish units serving in distinctly Irish Divisions. Despite these figures being drawn from a relatively small sample of officers (due to difficulties faced by the historian in obtaining sufficient information) it would appear as if John Redmond’s statement that ‘with the exception of two or three subalterns, there was not a Catholic officer in the [16<sup>th</sup>] Division’, was an exaggeration. Indeed, at the time of his speech in 1916, there were at least seven known Catholics in the 6<sup>th</sup> Connaught Rangers, let alone the rest of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>13</sup>

In spite of the wider political battles being fought around them, the officers appear to have got on with the war in a peaceful and often harmonious manner. F.W.S. Jourdain recalled that ‘It never seemed to worry anybody’, whilst reiterating the fact that despite being one of the few English public-school boys in the battalion, there was no animosity directed towards him at all.<sup>14</sup> As another Connaught Rangers officer (who had once tried to raise a troop of horse to aid Sir Edward Carson) told John Dillon when entertaining him at Aldershot in 1916, ‘Mr. Dillon, war brings strange nest fellows’, and in this regiment, it particularly seems to have been the case.<sup>15</sup> Where possible, regimental unity appears to have been maintained through the promotion of officers from within the Connaught Rangers itself. In the 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> (Regular) Battalion(s), only one man above the rank of lieutenant joined from outside the regiment between 1914 and 1916, whilst some 32 gained promotion to, and a further 14 retained, the ranks of captain, major or lieutenant-colonel from within Connaught Rangers during the same period. To a certain degree the same can be said for the Service battalions between 1916 and 1918, though the severe casualties sustained during this period ensured many more exceptions.

---

<sup>10</sup> IWM 7332, Private Papers of C.A. Brett, *Recollections*, 46.

<sup>11</sup> Bryan Cooper, *The Tenth (Irish) Division in Gallipoli* (London: Naval and Military Press, 2003); and Terence Denman, *Ireland’s Unknown Soldiers: The 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division in the Great War, 1914-1918* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1992), 46.

<sup>12</sup> IWMSA 11214/2, Interview with F.W.S. Jourdain.

<sup>13</sup> Parl. Debs. (House of Commons), vol. 86, cols. 581-696, 18 October, 1916.

<sup>14</sup> IWMSA 11214/2, Interview with F.W.S. Jourdain.

<sup>15</sup> Parl. Debs. (House of Commons), vol. 86, cols. 581-696, 18 October, 1916.

The unforeseen post-war effects were both catastrophic and far-reaching. For with the almost instantaneous exodus of many officers holding temporary commissions, the regiment's officer corps remained populated with a group of pre-war regulars whose wartime service had proven to be somewhat of an anomaly. Consequently, as F.W.S. Jourdain noted, 'directly when we got back to 1919, we went back to 1914', with officers reverting to pre-war norms of soldiering and officer-man relations.<sup>16</sup> Having seen very little in the way of intense fighting, these officers were somewhat out of touch with their men, many of whom were veterans of the Service battalions whose own experiences prefigured a more cooperative relationship with their superiors. This was something which would become a key factor in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's mutiny in India in 1920.

The monthly Army Lists from July 1914 through to June 1920 are fairly instructive on this point. Not only is it evident that the senior ranks of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion comprised a majority of pre-war Regulars from across both the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions, but also that these men, with few exceptions, had not been afforded the opportunity during the war to advance their careers. Indeed, barring the fresh-faced junior officers (temporary or otherwise) and the more fluid character of the 5<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion, which laid down its arms in 1919 only to pick them up again as the reconstituted 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, one might almost be inclined to suggest that nothing much had changed. Majors H.R.G. Deacon and W.N.S. Alexander, the two most senior officers with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion at the time of the mutiny, had started and ended the war in the same regiment and with the same rank.<sup>17</sup> Captains R.L. Payne, E.G.S. Truell, O.F. Lloyd, and H.J. Nolan-Ferrall were all regular officers attached to either the 1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions in 1914. With the exception of Nolan-Ferrall, who served with the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion at Gallipoli, all ended the war having seen service with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion in the Middle-East, earning just one step in promotion to major. Even Leslie Charles Badham, a troubled NCO in the regiment before 1914, served the majority of the war with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion finishing up as a captain.<sup>18</sup> Collectively, they represented a group of officers whose careers had somewhat stagnated in spite of the opportunities usually afforded by war. Moreover, they fed into what Keith Simpson has termed the 'embarrassing surplus' of Regular officers to remain in the rapidly reduced post-war army.<sup>19</sup>

Demobilisation proved to be a deeply troubling process for the British Army. Not only were there a series of large scale strikes throughout 1919, but the organisational and structural challenges it created took quite some time to overcome. In the case of the Connaught Rangers, this manifested itself in the top-heavy nature of its post-war officer

---

<sup>16</sup> IWMSA 11214/7, Interview with F.W.S. Jourdain; and IWM 11087, Extract from a letter from Colonel F.W.S. Jourdain 20, May, 1971.

<sup>17</sup> Deacon did see a period of service with the Highland Light Infantry in 1916.

<sup>18</sup> Monthly Army Lists, 1914-1920 (London: HMSO). I am indebted to William Butler for directing me to some information regarding Badham's early wartime service. See The National Archives (TNA) WO339/13680, Officer Service Record for Leslie Charles Badham. The Connaught Rangers.

<sup>19</sup> Simpson, "The Officers", 91.

corps. Whereas a standard British battalion serving overseas in 1920 comprised three or four majors and five, but usually six, captains, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Connaught Rangers possessed five majors and just three captains.<sup>20</sup> The result was a senior-to-junior officer ratio out of kilter and a command structure that was too out of touch with the needs and concerns of its men. F.W.S. Jourdain, the then adjutant, observed the problems of such an imbalance when questioned about the officers who sailed with the battalion to India:

they were majors and majors were a pretty senior rank and unless they were particularly good officers, they didn't want to involve themselves with the other ranks' family troubles and things like that. And of course, there were troubles that were beginning to bubble up – nothing to do with the mutiny, as such – but the fact that they knew they were going to India.<sup>21</sup>

The fact that the newly promoted Colonel Deacon was only due to re-join the regiment once it arrived in India, leaving what were described as 'not a very bright lot' in charge further emphasises the point.<sup>22</sup>

Once in India, tensions between fellow officers, as well as between officers and men, rose appreciably. The battalion gave off a very poor impression to other units in the Punjab. For instance, Brigadier C.I. Gerrard stationed with the 51<sup>st</sup> Sikh Regiment at Jullundur in 1920, noted: 'We played a lot of football against the Rangers but their officers were never present and their teams were run by NCOs. We gained the impression that the officers were not in close touch with their men'.<sup>23</sup> Given the expectation in the post-war army that officers and men would share the field with each other to strengthen paternalistic bonds and that all-important *esprit de corps*, such absence was telling.<sup>24</sup> Gerrard's observations extended even further, describing how the subalterns appeared to have 'a chip on their shoulder' and much to say against their Colonel and Adjutant.<sup>25</sup> The former, H.R.G. Deacon, was said to have been a 'great bully' who 'ticked off senior officers in front of the juniors, and what was worse, officers in front of the men'.<sup>26</sup> The latter, L.W.L. Leader, was described as 'sly' and 'untrustworthy', fostering particular dislike from the men.<sup>27</sup> Major Payne was purportedly rarely seen sober after the hour of six o'clock, while Captain Badham, incurred the ire of the men around the time of the mutiny when he informed them that their scheduled leave the following day was to be revoked in favour

---

<sup>20</sup> Mario Draper, "Mutiny under the Sun: The Connaught Rangers, India, 1920," *War in History* 27, no. 2 (2019): 207-208.

<sup>21</sup> IWMSA, 11214/7 Interview with F.W.S. Jourdain.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> NAM, 7609-35-12, Brigadier C.I. Gerrard quoted in letter from Alleyne to McPeake, 15 December 1974.

<sup>24</sup> Tony Mason and Eliza Riedi, *Sport and the Military: The British Armed Forces 1880-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 4, 41, 44-45, 96-98, 136; & David French, *Military Identities, The Regimental System, the British Army & the British People, c.1870-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 118-119.

<sup>25</sup> NAM, 7609-35-12, Gerrard to McPeake, 15 December 1974.

<sup>26</sup> NAM, 7609-35-12, Robertson to McPeake, 3 January 1971.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

of a musketry course.<sup>28</sup> Given the soaring temperatures of the Indian summer, such an insensitive act reflected the mutineers' feelings of being overworked for want of ideas among the officers of how best to keep them active. More generally, the impression here is of a toxic culture within the regiment that saw a top-heavy cadre of officers lose touch with its men.

While this naturally reflected poorly on the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Connaught Rangers, it equally shone a light on the broader structural issues of the post-war British Army. If the imbalance, or outdated methods, of officers could cause such problems in one regiment, it could conceivably happen in another. Disciplinary problems among the Grenadier Guards at Pirbright Camp in June 1919, as well as in the 39<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers in Egypt the following month, suggest that the Connaught Rangers were not unique in this regard.<sup>29</sup> What all three cases had in common were the elements of intransigent officership, combustible circumstances, and individuals willing to act. This reflects Paul Huddie's recent long-durée contextualisation of mutiny in the British Army (specifically Irish cases) as something rather akin to labour disputes in a military context.<sup>30</sup> Given the demands placed on the army in Europe, the Middle-East, and India at this time, the frequency of such incidents was a cause for grave concern. In many ways it underlines why the authorities were prepared to explain away instances of mutiny in political terms. Seditious, while dangerous, could be contained, whereas drawing attention to oversights and structural failings in the post-war army might prove more damaging. For this reason both the demobilisation strikes and the Connaught Rangers Mutiny were readily attributed to Bolshevik and Sinn Féin infiltration respectively, despite little evidence to support such claims.<sup>31</sup>

The official line that the Connaught Rangers Mutiny was politically motivated appears to have come from Deacon himself, whose report to the Viceroy Army Department sought to absolve the officers of all blame. He claimed that the mutiny came as a complete surprise, with good reason to believe that the outbreak of indiscipline was engineered by Sinn Féin.<sup>32</sup> Deacon naturally had an interest in portraying events in this light, given both his and Major Alexander's respective failings in dealing effectively with the situation. While politics cannot be completely ignored, the idea of a premeditated Sinn Féin strike at the heart of British India does not tally with the rather measured response from the Viceroy Army Department, which was reluctant to send the battalion home for fear it might send the wrong message. Moreover, there was reason to believe that the

---

<sup>28</sup> IWMSA, 11214/7 Interview with F.W.S. Jourdain; & National Archives Ireland (NAI), 2000/6/11, Summary of Evidence: Solon. Captain Leslie Badham's Testimony, 18 August 1920.

<sup>29</sup> French, *Military Identities*, 199-200; & J.T. Saltman, "'Odds and Sods': Minorities in the British Empire's Campaign for Palestine, 1916-1919," (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2013), 158-161 & 167.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Huddie, "The Nenagh Mutiny of 7-8 July 1856: a re-appraisal," *British Journal for Military History* 6, no. 1 (2020): 5-20.

<sup>31</sup> William Butler, "'The British Soldier is No Bolshevik': The British Army, Discipline, and the Demobilization Strikes of 1919", *Twentieth Century British History* 30, no. 3 (2019): 321-346; & Draper, 'Mutiny Under the Sun', 202-223.

<sup>32</sup> British Library, L/MIL/13314 – 110, Copy of Telegram from Viceroy Army Department, 9 July 1920.

loyal element would predominate.<sup>33</sup> While letters from home may have been a factor in triggering discontent, this might well be seen as the spark to light the tinderbox. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Connaught Rangers was not a happy environment. It would have taken very little to turn loyal soldiers into temporary protestors, and protestors into mutineers. Politics was clearly on the men's minds, but it would be a leap of faith to claim that it was the primary motivating factor in their collective disobedience. The timeline of events simply does not add up to this. Neither does the idea that a targeted Sinn Féin operation would have limited itself to just one battalion in the British Army, and affect only three of its companies at that. Reports into the state of political agitation in other Irish units returned no cause for immediate concern – though, once again, men were urged to stand strong in the face of a perceived Bolshevik threat.<sup>34</sup>

The British Army faced all manner of challenges in the period 1918-1922. Warding off supposedly seditious elements was but a minor concern compared to the difficulties of adequately reshaping a post-demobilisation army with global commitments amidst the prospect of savage budgetary cuts. As Keith Jeffery has noted, Sir Henry Wilson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, faced greater responsibility than any of his predecessors due to Britain's enlarged acquisitions and commitments in the Middle East, France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Greece, Austria-Hungary, Serbia, Bulgaria, the Ottoman Empire and Russia – let alone the British Isles and the Empire. At his disposal, Wilson had a diminishing force, which had numbered 3.5 million men in November 1918 but was reduced to 800,000 a year later, and to just 370,000 by November 1920.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, the appointment of Austen Chamberlain as Chancellor of the Exchequer, heralded a period of cost-cutting, resulting in the swollen post-war Army Estimates of £405 million for 1919-1920 being paired back to £134 million for 1920-1921.<sup>36</sup> Recruitment for the army naturally suffered. In July 1919, Lord Chelmsford (Viceroy of India 1916-21) complained about the quality of troops the War Office was planning on drafting to India. A number of the 21 battalions earmarked were category B1 men (i.e. men able to 'march at least 5 miles, see to shoot with the aid of glasses and hear *nil*.'). The standard of troops in Germany was equally low with a high proportion of very young and inexperienced men.<sup>37</sup> Against this backdrop, effective military reorganisation was all but impossible, resulting in lasting structural and personnel issues among both officers and men that increased the likelihood of disciplinary issues on active service.

---

<sup>33</sup> British Library, L/MIL/13314 – 117, Copy of Telegram from Viceroy Army Department to Secretary of State for India, 4 July 1920.

<sup>34</sup> British Library, L/MIL/13314 – 107, Copy of Telegram from Viceroy Army Department to War Office, 15 July 1920.

<sup>35</sup> Keith Jeffery, *The British army and the crisis of empire 1918-22* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 13.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-22. The Geddes Committee argued for further reductions by reducing the army by fifty thousand officers and men resulting in further cuts to the Army Estimates from £75,197,800 to £55,000,000 for 1922-1923.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.



The statistical returns provided by the Regimental Histories for the demobilisation and remobilisation of some Irish units is highly illustrative of this upheaval. Battalions found themselves reduced to cadre strength within a matter of months.<sup>38</sup> As quickly as Battalions were gutted of their manpower, however, they were seemingly brought back up to strength for foreign service. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Regiment, for instance, had been at cadre strength in May 1919 but bounced back to an almost full complement of 35 officers and 866 other ranks by October.<sup>39</sup> A similar tale of rapid turnover can be found in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers, whose cadre strength of 14 officers and 54 other ranks was, at first, added to by seven officers and 93 men of the 3<sup>rd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion in June 1919, before being raised to a total strength of 900 men three months later. The regimental historian noted how men had:

flocked back to the colours during 1919. The officers had seen service to a man and comprised as experienced and distinguished a body as the Regiment has ever had at its disposal. The rank and file were remarkable. At a time when an old soldier was hardly to be met with in the "New Army" except for a few N.C.Os. and employed men, the Regiment found itself in the happy position of parading over 500 N.C.Os. and men, in one battalion with war experience. Every member of the Serjeants' Mess wore a war decoration, most wearing three, and many even more.<sup>40</sup>

The implication here, of course, was that the experience they attracted back to the colours was somewhat of an anomaly. The majority of the army simply had to make do with what it could get and paper over any cracks as best it could.

In the case of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Connaught Rangers, Anthony Babington appeared to take the official view that the mutiny was, in large part, caused by the new drafts that had recently arrived in India.<sup>41</sup> The Viceroy Army Department noted that '172 out of 206 men comprising [the] last two drafts from home were mutineers at Jullundur which clearly indicates [the] source of trouble.'<sup>42</sup> This can be read in one of two ways. Either, it reflects the fact that inexperience and a lack of acclimatisation made these men more susceptible to ill-discipline, or that their recent time at home kept the injustices of British rule in Ireland dangerously near the surface. It is likely that the truth lay somewhere between the two. However, as with many claims about the mutiny, there are clarifications to be made. While these 172 men may well have been involved in the mutiny, its ringleaders were overwhelmingly Great War veterans. Of the 61 men tried by court-martial at Solon, 30 had more than five years' experience in the army. Of the remainder at least 17 others had

---

<sup>38</sup> Colonel H.C. Wyllie, *Crown and Company: The Historical Records of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Batt, Royal Dublin Fusiliers: Formerly the 1<sup>st</sup> Bombay European Regiment* (Uckfield: The Naval & Military Press Ltd, 1923), 128; & Captain S. McCance, *History of the Royal Munster Fusiliers 1861 to 1922*. Vol. II. (Uckfield: The Naval and Military Press Ltd, 1927), 88.

<sup>39</sup> Brigadier.-General S. Geoghegan, *Royal Irish Regiment, 1900-1922* (Naval & Military Press Ltd, Uckfield, 2007), 134.

<sup>40</sup> McCance, *History of the Royal Munster Fusiliers*, 169-170.

<sup>41</sup> Babington, *Devil to Pay*, 41.

<sup>42</sup> British Library, L/MIL/13314 – 110, Copy of Telegram from Viceroy Army Department, 9 July 1920.

service records predating the Armistice of 1918.<sup>43</sup> What this points to is disgruntlement rather than inexperience, poor officer-man relations rather than politicisation. Naturally, many of these men would have returned home after demobilisation and witnessed the heavy hand of British rule, so it is not beyond the realms of possibility to assume that such things played on their minds. However, were they, or any fresh recruit such as James Daly, to have been so minded as to strike a blow for Ireland as a result of recent events, there would have been little incentive to voluntarily (re-)enlist.

It is for this reason that the British Army was confident in its use of Irish regiments in testing operations between 1919 and 1922. Irrespective of what was happening back home in Ireland, the loyalty of Irish troops was never seriously brought into question. Even after the mutiny, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Connaught Rangers, continued its tour of duty in the Punjab, while the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was deployed to Upper Silesia. The ethnic and religious tensions in the latter made operations there no easy task. While it is telling that Wilson felt it impossible to use Irish units to quell the unrest in Ireland, it is important to note that at one time or another, battalions from the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, Connaught Rangers, the Leinster Regiment, Royal Munster Fusiliers, and the Royal Irish Regiment were all trusted with service in this politically volatile region teeming with paramilitary activity.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers were to be found engaged in challenging conditions policing Cairo in 1920, following which a senior British official noted, 'Your drill, internal economy, discipline, and turn-out rate are of a very high order, and your behaviour out of barracks has been a model to all.'<sup>45</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers were involved in all manner of occupation duties (as well as some action against Turkish nationalists) during their 1919-1920 stay in the Ottoman Empire before being shipped off to India shortly after James Daly's execution in November.<sup>46</sup> It should even be noted that a detachment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Connaught Rangers were hastily charged with the duty of accompanying the remains of the Unknown Warrior from Dover to London on 10 November 1920: an event of the utmost national importance.

Little is known about the aftermath of the mutiny in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Connaught Rangers. Records detailing the day-to-day engagements, the conversations, and the feelings of the men who either remained loyal or were coaxed into returning to their duties await their discovery. However, it is fair to assume that the mood would have been a sombre and reflective one. Unsurprisingly, the January 1921 Army List details no change in the composition of the Battalion's officer cadre, despite the passing of Captain Leslie Badham on 30 December 1920 following a bout of pneumonia. Yet, by January 1922, only 14 of the 26 officers listed as being with the battalion a year earlier remained with the regiment. Of the nine officers holding rank above lieutenant, only W.N.S. Alexander,

---

<sup>43</sup> NAI 2000/6/11, Summary of Evidence: Solon, 18 August 1920.

<sup>44</sup> My thanks go to William Butler for allowing me to read advanced proofs of his forthcoming article, "At the Limit of Power? The British Army, Upper Silesia, and International Diplomacy, 1920-1922".

<sup>45</sup> McCance, *History of the Royal Munster Fusiliers*, 173.

<sup>46</sup> Wylly, *Crown and Company*, 134-135.

promoted lieutenant-colonel in February 1921, and Captains H.D. McKay and F.D. Foott continued to serve with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. The likes of Deacon, Payne, Truell (the officer commanding A Company which remained loyal at Jutogh), Lloyd, and Nolan-Ferrall had all left the army or been transferred. The despised adjutant, L.W.L. Leader, was no longer with the regiment either. Such a turnover of senior officers is indicative of an authoritative wielding of the proverbial axe. It was the surest way of acknowledging both the structural failings that had led to the mutiny and the individual mistakes of those officers who had failed to contain it, without drawing undue public attention. Moreover, it provided a clean slate to rebuild officer-man relations in this troubled battalion.

While it may be tempting to suggest that the turnover in the Connaught Rangers' senior officers by January 1922 was directly related to the impending disbandment of the Irish Regiments, it is worth remembering that this decision had not yet been made. In fact, rumours of disbandment were only noted by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers on 30 January 1922, with confirmation reaching all the affected units on 11 March.<sup>47</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Connaught Rangers was still serving in India at the time. A letter from Major General Sir Herbert C.C. Uniacke, commanding Rawal Pindi District to Lieutenant Colonel W.N.S. Alexander at this juncture reveals a little more about the state of the battalion and is worth quoting at length:

I have to-day filled in my remarks on what will presumably be the last inspection report on the battalion under your command.

I feel, however, that as the regiment, after an unbroken period of service of 129 years in all parts of the world, is now on the eve of disbandment, something more is required than a few bald statements in an official form.

You recently for a brief period fell on troublous [sic.] times, but have won through with every credit to yourselves, and the Battalion stands now a well-disciplined, well-trained body of men that anyone should be proud to command. This state of efficiency could not have been attained unless the Officers, N.C.O.'s and men had given the most loyal support to the Commanding Officer, and I consider the way in which all ranks have played the game during the past twelve months is beyond all praise.

Now, when the Battalion is about to be struck off the muster roll of the British Army, you may pass away as a body of fighting men, fit for service anywhere, with your heads held high, confident that you have upheld the old reputation of the Rangers.

I have known the Battalion, off and on, for the last 34 years, and have always had a tender spot in my heart for it, and things being as they are, I am proud to be the last General Officer under whose command it will have served.

If ever I was in a tight place, with things looking pretty black, there is no battalion in the British, or any other Army, that I would rather have at my beck and call than the old 88th Connaught Rangers.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> McCance, *History of the Royal Munster Fusiliers*, 134.

<sup>48</sup> Jourdain and Fraser, *The Connaught Rangers* vol. 1, 573-574.

The history of the Connaught Rangers between 1914-1922 is a fairly chequered one. Despite serving with distinction across multiple theatres throughout the Great War, a serious question mark emerged over the strength of its intra-officer and officer-man relations. The structural issues caused by the rapid demobilization of the British Army in 1919 only served to exacerbate these issues. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Connaught Rangers emerged from this chaotic reshuffling with an officer cadre that looked remarkably similar to that of 1914. Regular officers, whose wartime experience in the Middle-East had not matched the intensity of their ‘temporary’ counterparts in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalions, returned to ‘normal soldiering’ practices despite commanding men whose conceptions of officer-man relations had been significantly altered by the war. The fact that the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was left hopelessly imbalanced as it embarked for India, with too many majors and too few captains, resulted in internal dislocation that saw senior officers lose touch with their junior counterparts, and ultimately the concerns of their men. Politics must have played on the men’s minds around this time. It would be false to declare otherwise. However, there is an overwhelming amount of documentary evidence to suggest that it was not the root cause of the mutiny – though, it would certainly come to play an enormous role in the narrative of events thereafter. Instead, there is good reason to view the events through a military lens and recognise the failings of both the officers on the ground and the broader structural problems faced by the British Army as it struggled to meet its expanded global commitments in the immediate post-war era. Although Irish units could not be trusted to serve in Ireland during the War of Independence, there appears to have been very little concern over the reliability of Irish units serving overseas. Not even the mutiny altered that fact. While it may be true that James Daly had to die for the sake of India and the army, this was but a necessary distraction away from the broader failings of demobilisation and the ineffectual leadership displayed by senior officers of the 1st Battalion, Connaught Rangers in June/July 1920.

### **Bibliography:**

- Babington, Anthony. *The Devil to Pay: The Mutiny of the Connaught Rangers, India, July, 1920*. London: Leo Cooper, 1991.
- Bartlett, Thomas. “The Connaught Rangers Mutiny India, July 1920,” *History Ireland* 6, no. 1 (1998).
- Bowman, Timothy. *Irish Regiments in the Great War: Discipline and Morale*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003.
- Bowman, Timothy. “Officering Kitchener’s Armies: A Case Study of the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division,” *War in History* 16, vol. 2 (2009): 189-212.

- Butler, William. “‘The British Soldier is No Bolshevik’: The British Army, Discipline, and the Demobilization Strikes of 1919”, *Twentieth Century British History* 30, no. 3 (2019): 321-346.
- Butler, William. “At the Limit of Power? The British Army, Upper Silesia, and International Diplomacy, 1920-1922”. Forthcoming.
- Callan, Patrick. “Recruiting for the British Army in Ireland during the First World War,” *Irish Sword* 17, no. 66 (1987): 42-56.
- Cooper, Bryan. *The Tenth (Irish) Division in Gallipoli*. London: Naval and Military Press, 2003.
- Denman, Terence. *Ireland’s Unknown Soldiers: The 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division in the Great War, 1914-1918*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1992.
- Draper, Mario. “Mutiny under the Sun: The Connaught Rangers, India, 1920,” *War in History* 27, no. 2 (2019): 202-23.
- Englander, David. “Discipline and Morale in the British Army, 1917-1918,” In *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, edited by John Horne, 125-43. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Feilding, Rowland *War Letters to a Wife: France and Flanders, 1915-1919*, edited by Jonathan Walker. London: Medici Society Ltd, 1929.
- French, David. *Military Identities, The Regimental System, the British Army & the British People, c.1870-2000*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Geoghegan, S. *Royal Irish Regiment, 1900-1922*. Naval & Military Press Ltd, Uckfield, 2007.
- Huddie, Paul. “The Nenagh Mutiny of 7-8 July 1856: a re-appraisal,” *British Journal for Military History* 6, no. 1, (2020): 5-20.
- Jeffery, Keith. *The British army and the crisis of empire 1918-22*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.
- Jeffery, Keith. “The Irish military tradition and the British Empire”, In *‘An Irish Empire’? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire*, edited by Keith Jeffrey, 94-122. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996.
- Jourdain, H.F.N. and Fraser, E. *The Connaught Rangers*, 3 vols. London, 1926.
- Kilfeather, T.P. *The Connaught Rangers*. Dublin: Anvil Books Ltd, 1969.
- Mason, Tony and Riedi, Eliza. *Sport and the Military: The British Armed Forces 1880-1960*. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- McCance, S. *History of the Royal Munster Fusiliers 1861 to 1922*. Vol. II. Uckfield: The Naval and Military Press Ltd, 1927.
- Monthly Army Lists, 1914-1920. London: HMSO.
- Morton-Jack, George. *The Indian Army on the Western Front: India’s Expeditionary Force to France and Belgium in the First World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

- Ohlmeyer, Jane. "Ireland, India and the British Empire," *Studies in People's History* 2 no. 2 (2015): 169-88.
- Pollock, Sam. *Mutiny for the Cause*. London: Leo Cooper Ltd, 1969.
- Saltman, J.T. "'Odds and Sods': Minorities in the British Empire's Campaign for Palestine, 1916-1919." Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2013.
- Silvestri, Michael. "The Sinn Fein of India": Irish Nationalism and the Policing of Revolutionary Terrorism in Bengal." *Journal of British Studies* 39, no. 4 (2000): 454-86.
- Silvestri, Michael. *Ireland and India: Nationalism, Empire and Memory*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Simpson, Keith. "The Officers," In *A Nation In Arms: The British Army in the First World War*, edited by Ian F.W. Beckett and Keith Simpson, 63-98. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985.
- Wyllie, H.C. *Crown and Company: The Historical Records of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Batt, Royal Dublin Fusiliers: Formerly the 1<sup>st</sup> Bombay European Regiment*. Uckfield: The Naval & Military Press Ltd, 1923.