“IN HIS COUNTRY’S SERVICE:” IRISH CATHOLIC MILITARY PARTICIPATION IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

by

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ABSTRACT

HANNAH GLYNN. “In His Country’s Service:” Irish Catholic Military Participation in the First World War.
(Under the direction of DR. HEATHER PERRY)

This thesis examines how Irish Catholic and nationalist military participation in the Great War reflected colonial tensions between Ireland and Great Britain in the early twentieth century. Whereas prior scholars have tended to examine Irish Catholic support for the war by studying soldiers’ combat experience or civilian attitudes on the home front, my thesis instead takes a social and cultural approach by studying the attitudes of the soldiers themselves. In chapter one, I examine how Irish Catholic soldiers of the First World War justified their service in the British forces by drawing on nationalist myth which had developed over the preceding centuries. This ‘myth of the Irish soldier’ claimed that Irishmen possessed the natural attributes of the ideal soldier. By the outbreak of World War I, this myth had been repeatedly repurposed in moderate nationalist rhetoric to suit changing circumstances, and it could thus be drawn upon to encourage Irish Catholics to fight on the side of Britain. In chapter two, I argue that the combination of this myth with rhetoric emphasizing Irish unity and sacrifice, regardless of the soldiers’ religious or political affiliation, increased solidarity among Irish soldiers within the ranks. As a result, national distinctions and tensions between Irish and English soldiers were more prevalent than inter-Irish divisions within the army, although this camaraderie among Irish soldiers was challenged by the Easter Rising of 1916 and its aftermath. This thesis indicates the complexity and malleability of religious, political, and national identity in Ireland in the early twentieth century, and it suggests that the Great War triggered a shift in identity and communal loyalty among Irish soldiers.

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INTRODUCTION

Before he was killed in action at Neuve Chapelle in October 1914, Irish Catholic Sergeant Anthony Boylan of the 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Rifles wrote to his mother that "England expects that every man will do his duty and we hope to plant the Union Jack where the Black Eagle now flies. Then when all is settled, all can rest assured Ireland will have Home Rule, she must have it after the way she stands by England in the time of need."[1] Although Boylan first referred to England's call for manpower and support, he mainly emphasized how *Ireland* would benefit from participation in the British cause. These complex sentiments were not unusual among Irish nationalists who had joined the British forces during the First World War; as historian Niamh Gallagher noted, "many nationalists in Ireland appeared to have entered the war in the belief that Home Rule would come into operation."[2] Thus these soldiers' enthusiasm for the war tended to stem not from the British or imperial cause, but from the understanding that their sacrifice on England's behalf would ensure that Ireland was rewarded with a measure of self-government after centuries of British domination.

My thesis focuses on Irish Catholic soldiers themselves in the British Army during World War I in order to analyze how nationalists and soldiers navigated the tensions between soldiers' personal sympathies and their oath of allegiance to the British Army. This project examines the persistence and evolution of nationalist myth and rhetoric by moderate nationalist leaders, Catholic clergy, and Irish soldiers themselves in support of the war. This social and cultural

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[1] Correspondence from Anthony Boylan to Mrs. Boylan, 1914, NAI/2002/119, Soldiers' Wills, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. http://soldierswills.nationalarchives.ie/reels/sw/BoylanA_E62436.pdf.

[2] Niamh Gallagher, *Ireland and the Great War: A Social and Political History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 142.

approach allows me to analyze how attitudes toward the Irish Catholic soldiers' participation and toward Great Britain changed throughout the Great War.

Historical Context

It is important to address the political and cultural tensions present in Ireland on the eve of the war. Ireland had been under various forms of English rule for centuries, although the official Act of Union between Great Britain and Ireland was not passed until 1801.[3] English rule was divisive at best, and the dominant strain of Irish nationalism in the late nineteenth century identified England as Ireland's natural enemy. This nationalism, led by Anglo-Irish Protestant Charles Parnell, was intentionally vague and flexible in order to appeal to the broadest interests. Parnellite nationalism successfully advocated for land reform on behalf of Irish tenants and farmers but, perhaps more importantly, it also garnered both Catholic and Protestant support by identifying the English as a seemingly eternal enemy of Ireland and placing the struggle for land rights and Home Rule within this broader, mythic context.

Significantly, this rhetoric had not only placed the English as foreigners and enemies but also as "Saxons" who worked to crush the "Celtic" race.[4] This idea of ancient conflict between the two races was popularized beyond the political sphere through the Celtic Revival, which ostensibly encouraged the preservation of Irish folklore, art, and history but also triggered criticism of those English policies which had initially stifled the culture. Because both Irish culture and Catholicism had been suppressed by the same English policies, the Revival's

[3] D. George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (3rd ed., London: Routledge, 1995), 19.
[4] Ibid., 196.

romanticized, frequently anti-English retellings of Irish history "eventually became the common ground on which clergy and revolutionaries met." [5]

At the same time, Irish Catholicism had become intertwined with the Home Rule movement, which urged the creation of a separate Irish Parliament. Parnell's successor in Irish nationalism was Catholic M.P. John Redmond of the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP). Thus, although both the Home Rule movement and the Celtic Revival had originated with Anglo-Irish Protestants, by the early twentieth century Irish nationalism in politics and culture was predominantly Catholic. The third Home Rule bill, brought in 1912, proposed the creation of an Irish parliament; although this parliament and Ireland herself would still remain a part of the United Kingdom, Catholic nationalists perceived a separate Irish parliament as a crucial step toward recognition as a distinct nation.[6] Rhetoric on both sides of the Home Rule debate grew increasingly contentious and frequently referred to racialized, often derogatory depictions of Saxon versus Celt, which had developed in the nineteenth century. I will discuss this language further in chapters one and two.

Great Britain's entry into the Great War in August 1914 brought all members of the United Kingdom into the conflict, including Ireland. As mentioned above, Home Rule and "the expectation that self-government was inevitable was…part of a mindset that framed nationalist attitudes and behaviors towards the war."[7] At the start of the war, only small groups of radical Irish nationalists within the Sinn Féin movement and the Irish Republican Brotherhood opposed

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[5] Kevin Collins, *Catholic Churchmen and the Celtic Revival in Ireland: 1848-1916* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), 17.

[6] Thomas Hennessey, *Dividing Ireland: World War One and Partition* (London: Routledge, 1998), 1-2.

[7] Gallagher, *Ireland and the Great War,* 142.

the war, supporting Germany simply because it was Britain's enemy.[8] Otherwise, there was widespread Irish support for the war and, despite centuries of religious conflict and resentment, thousands of Irish Catholics and Protestants alike volunteered for the British forces.

Exact Irish enlistment figures are difficult to determine, but estimates show broad support and participation across the island. Historian Jason Myers estimated that Irish volunteers in the British forces—enlisting both within Ireland and outside—numbered 350,000 by the war's end, with the number of men within Ireland of military age "estimated at 550,000 in 1915."[9] David Fitzpatrick estimated a total of 210,000 Irish enlistments within Ireland, fifty-seven percent of whom were Catholic.[10] Keith Jeffery suggested that the 1911 census showed around 700,000 men of military age in Ireland, and that "between a quarter and a third of the available young men in Ireland—a strikingly high proportion in the absence of conscription—served in the First World War."[11] These numbers refer only to men who were personally willing to enlist and does not include Irish civilian support through voluntary, medical, or charitable organizations. Thus it is clear that, regardless of religion or political sentiment, a significant proportion of the Irish population supported the war in some measure.

To encourage Irish Catholic and nationalist support, Irish nationalist leaders and Catholic clergy drew parallels between Ireland and Belgium: both were small, primarily-Catholic countries threatened by more powerful neighbors. Germany's crimes and perceived barbarism were also emphasized. At the same time, many claimed that Ireland's glory was at stake if

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[8] Hennessey, *Dividing Ireland*, 63-64.

[9] Jason Myers, *The Great War and Memory in Irish Culture, 1918-2010* (Palo Alto: Academica Press, 2013), 12.

[10] David Fitzpatrick, "Militarism in Ireland, 1900-1922," in *A Military History of Ireland*, eds. Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 389.

[11] Keith Jeffery, *1916 A Global History* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 110.

Irishmen did not fight the German invaders, and if the Irish played a role in British victory they might be afforded a greater measure of independence.[12] Unlike propaganda within Great Britain, very little pro-war rhetoric within Ireland and especially the south referred to the glory of the British monarchy or empire; instead, *Ireland's* glory and desire for increased autonomy was the primary aim. This difference in motivation and perception of the war—and Ireland's role in it—would continue to influence attitudes of Irish Catholics within the ranks of the British army.

Historiography

Since the establishment of the Irish Free State, Irish officials have promoted a teleological historical narrative leading to current independence and attempting to prove her legitimacy as a sovereign state.[13] However, the fact remains that Ireland was under British rule for centuries, and this imperial rule resulted in systemic violence and oppression. Ireland's status as a British colony still remains contested despite decades of debate. I mention this first because the divide between Ireland and Great Britain—even if not explicitly identified in scholarship as a product of colonialism—is inherent in the subsequent trends in Irish historiography. In a chapter in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies* examining the debate over whether Ireland can be considered a colony, David Lloyd explained the essential controversy surrounding the label: "to assert that Ireland is and has been a colony is certainly to deny the legitimacy of British government in

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[12] Gallagher, *Ireland and the Great War*, 145.

[13] See for example Dorothy Macardle, *Irish Republic: A Documented Chronicle of the Anglo-Irish Conflict and the Partitioning of Ireland, with a Detailed Account of the Period 1916-1923 with a Preface by Eamon de Valera* (London: Gallancz, 1937). This partisan official history and its approval by Free State leaders is discussed in detail in John M. Regan, *Myth and the Irish State: Historical Problems and Other Essays* (Sallins, Co. Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2013), 147-149.

Northern Ireland and no less to question the state and governmental structures that have been institutionalized in the postcolonial Free State and Republic of Ireland."[14]

Nonetheless, Lloyd correctly suggested that in order to properly study Irish history, scholars must acknowledge the influence of colonialism, and he was not the only scholar to address this. David Cairns and Shaun Richards' 1988 work *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Culture* was one of the most influential books examining Ireland in a colonial context. Their predominantly cultural history was rooted in poststructuralism in order to analyze language and literature while also contrasting British systems of power with Irish forms of resistance. Most significantly for this thesis they used literature, including the works of William Shakespeare, to explore the ways in which English "colonial discourse established the colonized [Irish] as the repressed and rejected 'other' against which the colonizer defines an ordered self."[15]

Scholars of Irish nationalism have made similar observations regarding racialized language and "othering," although they tend not to describe it specifically as "colonial discourse." In his 1995 book *Nationalism in Ireland*, D. George Boyce traced Irish identity and nationalism from Norman conquest through the twentieth century, describing how nationalism was expressed in both the political and the cultural realm. Of direct relevance for this thesis, he described depictions of the Irish or "Celtic race," especially in the nineteenth century. Irish nationalists themselves accepted this implication of an inherent racial distinction between Irish and British populations; as mentioned earlier, nineteenth-century nationalism framed Irish

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[14] David Lloyd, "Ireland After History," in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, eds. Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 379.

[15] David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 8.

history as a conflict between the Irish (Catholic) Celtic race and the English Saxon. This racialized rhetoric will be described in more detail in chapters one and two. Paul Townend similarly studied Irish nationalism and anti-imperialism, particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[16] He suggested that increased anti-English rhetoric during this time was not only the result of intentional propaganda by nationalist leaders but also of a wider trend of anti-imperialism on the part of the Irish Catholic population, which he argued was more anti-British than even the nationalist leaders. Significantly, he attributed this hostility toward Great Britain to the development and popularization of Irish myth and history.[17]

The next historiographical trend is the study of Irish military participation both within and outside the British empire, from the eighteenth through the twentieth century. The extensive works of scholars such as Terence Denman, Keith Jeffery, Timothy Bowman, and Myles Dungan responded to existing Great War scholarship which tended to minimize or ignore Irish Catholic and nationalist support.[18] Their works, published primarily in the 1990s and early 2000s, focused on enlistment patterns and wartime experience.[19] For example, Terence Denman and

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[16] Paul A. Townend, *The Road to Home Rule: Anti-imperialism and the Irish National Movement* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016): xiv-xv.

[17] Ibid., 236.

[18] See for example J. M. Winter, *The Experience of World War I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995): 50-51, 57. Winter described contributions and enlistment numbers from British dominions and colonial holdings such as Canada, South Africa, Australia, and India, but Ireland was discussed almost exclusively in the context of the Easter Rising and radical nationalist opposition to the war.

[19] The works of David Fitzpatrick also deserve mention, although he published no monographs on the topic of Ireland in World War I. Like the other scholars of this trend, Fitzpatrick's articles or works published in edited volumes explore trends of Irish militarism in the early twentieth century and enlistment motivations in World War I. See "The Logic of Collective Sacrifice: Ireland and the British Army, 1914-1918," *The Historical Journal* 38, no. 4 (1995): 1017-1030; "Militarism in Ireland, 1900-1922," in *A Military History of Ireland*, eds. Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 379-406.

Keith Jeffery both wrote multiple articles exploring Irish enlistment before and during the Great War, and they described Irish military service in the nineteenth and early twentieth century as an avenue for Irish participation in British imperialism.[20]

Terence Denman's *Ireland's Unknown Soldiers: The 16th (Irish) Division in the Great War* and Timothy Bowman's *The Irish Regiments in the Great War: Discipline and Morale* both explored contributions of Irish units in World War I, and particularly Irish units with heavy Catholic nationalist composition.[21] Similarly, Keith Jeffery's *Ireland and the Great War,* Myles Dungan's *Irish Voices from the Great War* and, more recently, *The Disparity of Sacrifice: Irish Recruitment to the British Armed Forces, 1914-1918* by Timothy Bowman, William Butler, and Michael Wheatley studied multiple aspects of Irish military participation in the First World War, from enlistment, to specific campaigns such as the Somme and Gallipoli, to postwar memorials.[22] Dungan described his 1995 work as an attempt to "[redress] the balance" of World War I scholarship, which had ignored Irish participation, and the scholars mentioned above seemed to share this goal as well.[23] This historiographical trend was heavily rooted in military history, but the analysis of enlistment trends, documentary evidence, and Irish regiments and

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[20] See Terence Denman, "The Catholic Irish Soldier in the First World War: The 'Racial Environment,'" *Irish Historical Studies* 27, no., 108 (1991): 352-365; Denman, "'Ethnic Soldiers Pure and Simple'? The Irish in the Late Victorian British Army," *War in History* 3, no. 3 (July 1996): 253-273. See also Keith Jeffery, "The Irish Military Tradition and the British Empire," in *An Irish Empire? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire,* ed. Keith Jeffery (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 94-122.

[21] Terence Denman, *Ireland's Unknown Soldiers: The 16th (Irish) Division in the Great War* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1992); Timothy Bowman, *The Irish Regiments in the Great War: Discipline and Morale* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

[22] Keith Jeffery, *Ireland and the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Myles Dungan, *Irish Voices from the Great War* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1995); Timothy Bowman et al., *The Disparity of Sacrifice: Irish Recruitment to the British Armed Forces, 1914-1918* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020).

[23] Dungan, *Irish Voices from the Great War,* 9.

campaigns proved that Irish military service in the British army served as a form of participation in the imperial project.

More recently, scholars have begun to examine Catholic Ireland's participation in the First World War beyond the lens of military history and instead through a cultural and social approach, particularly examining popular opinion at home. Their works placed the Irish experience in context by comparing waxing and waning enthusiasm with similar patterns in Great Britain. They challenged the perception that the British were blindly enthusiastic or that the Irish opposed to the war, showing instead that reactions across the United Kingdom—including Ireland—were equally complex throughout the first few months but tended toward reasoned support of the war.[24]

Adrian Gregory's 2008 *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* was a cultural history which examined the civilian understanding of the war, challenging popular perceptions that "the British sustained the war effort because they had been manipulated and fooled."[25] While Gregory's work focused primarily on Great Britain—he acknowledged in his introduction that he was unable to include Ireland to a greater extent due to the book's length—he discussed the increase in anti-Irish sentiment in Britain as the war progressed.[26] Catriona Pennell's 2012 *A Kingdom United: Popular responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in*

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[24] Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 194.

[25] Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 6, doi:10.1017/CBO9780511818370.

[26] Gregory previously addressed Ireland's role in the war by serving as co-editor with Senia Pašeta of *Ireland and the Great War: 'A War to Unite Us All?'* See Adrian Gregory, "'You might as well recruit Germans': British public opinion and the decision to conscript the Irish in 1918," in *Ireland and the Great War: 'A War to Unite Us All?'* eds. Adrian Gregory and Senia Pašeta (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 113-132.

Britain and Ireland similarly analyzed popular opinion in the United Kingdom in the first months of the war, but significantly she worked to incorporate Irish popular opinion as well. In contrast, Niamh Gallagher's 2020 *Ireland and the Great War: A Social and Political History* focused on the mindset of middle- and lower-class Irish Catholics at home. Like Pennell, her work directly challenged the predominant perception that Catholic republicans in the south of Ireland opposed the war effort and that the majority of Irish support came from Ulster Protestants.

Scholars have also explored the impact of the Great War on Catholic nationalist and Protestant unionist identity in Ireland. Thomas Hennessey's *Dividing Ireland*, published in 1998, argued that the experience of World War I played a crucial role in dividing Irish nationalists and unionists beyond any hope of compromise. Hennessey noted that Protestant Irish—located primarily in Ulster—defined themselves against the Catholic Irish "other," and vice versa.[27] These contrasting identities, based on religious and ethnic distinctions, remained a constant source of conflict. However, Hennessey suggested that it was the experience of the First World War that ultimately made irreconcilable the division between Protestant Irish, who clung to a British identity, and Catholics, who often considered themselves Irish rather than British.

Jonathan Evershed traced the diverging narratives of the war and its aftermath. His *Ghosts of the Somme* explored how Protestant unionists in Ulster began—and continue—to claim World War I and especially the 1916 Battle of the Somme as an experience unique to Ulster Protestants, in contrast with Catholic nationalist commemorations of the 1916 Easter Rising and

[27] Hennessey, *Dividing Ireland*, xiii.

later revolutionary movements.[28] John Regan similarly explored how military and political leaders of the Irish Free State such as Michael Collins came to be mythologized even in official public history. He noted how commemoration and perception of public figures fluctuated according to political climate; for example, as public opinion turned against violence and physical force with the outbreak of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, Irish historical works shifted focus from revolutionary activity to constitutional nationalism.[29]

This brief survey of historiography indicates that the study of Irish Catholic support for the First World War only recently gained traction; interest in the topic was boosted by the centenary of the war, but lingering religious and political tensions make the subject a contentious one. Niamh Gallagher's 2020 *Ireland and the Great War* was the first broad examination of Catholic Irish support, though she focused her work largely on the Irish civilian population at home. My thesis is most closely related to her work, as she too focused on behaviors and attitudes of the Irish Catholic population. Whereas much of the prior scholarship focusing on Irish Catholic nationalists during World War I examined combat experience or the Irish home front, I take a social and cultural approach to study perceptions of and by Irish Catholic soldiers themselves in the British Army during World War I. I suggest that moderate nationalists and Irish soldiers deployed and internalized nationalist myth and history—even when it had traditionally been used as anti-English propaganda—which encouraged Irish Catholic support and enlistment in the British army for nationalist ends.

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[28] Jonathan Evershed, *Ghosts of the Somme: Commemoration and Culture War in Northern Ireland* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 11.

[29] John M. Regan, *Myth and the Irish State: Historical Problems and Other Essays* (Sallins, Co. Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2013), 149.

Methodology and Sources

It is not my intention to definitively analyze Ireland's status as a colony; however, I agree with Lloyd that "arguments based on the acceptance of Ireland's colonial history have indeed shown a greater explanatory power and offered a more inclusive depiction of the dynamics of Irish society than have other approaches."[30] This does not diminish the fact that Ireland—and other British colonies and dominions—markedly supported the war; however, a full examination of Ireland during World War I is not possible without acknowledging the tensions inherent in Irish Catholic and nationalist allegiance to the British Army. Although my work does not deeply discuss postcolonialism/poststructuralism, it is informed by an understanding that relations between Ireland and England were inherently unequal due to the colonial relationship.

I especially tried to avoid reading nationalist attitudes and behaviors during World War I through the lens of postwar revolutionary developments. As such, my project forms a middle ground between purely military history and social/cultural history of Ireland in the Great War, and it considers the above-mentioned power imbalance resulting from Ireland's colonial status in the early twentieth century. I examine rhetoric and mythologization of Irish soldiers leading up to and during the First World War, and how colonial relationships and attitudes affected interactions between Irish and English soldiers within the ranks of the British army.

The very structure and procedures of the army, such as the oath of allegiance upon enlistment, stressed Britain's rule over Ireland. Form letters such as Army Form B 104-82 notifying a soldier's next-of-kin of his death further emphasized British supremacy: "By His Majesty's command I am to forward the enclosed message of sympathy from Their Gracious

[30] Lloyd, *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, 388.

Majesties the King and Queen. I am at the same time to express the regret of the Army Council at the soldier's death in his Country's service."[31] For these Irish Catholic families, the apparent sympathy of the British monarch and the suggestion that the soldier died "in his Country's [*Britain's*] service" likely highlighted the divide between British and Irish motivations.

Keith Jeffery noted that "the [Irish] military relationship…displays characteristics of both imperial unity and separatism, affection and enmity, service and subversion."[32] Thomas Dooley similarly noted that, in the early twentieth century, "attitudes toward nationality, imperialism and the army were ambiguous and capricious;" Irish hostility or pride in the army fluctuated, with "events and changing circumstances determining which of these conflicting views was uppermost" at any given time.[33] Given these complex attitudes and loyalties, how did Irish Catholics and nationalists justify participation and sacrifice during the First World War in an ostensibly British cause?

In the first chapter of this thesis, I examine how moderate nationalists drew on a long history of mythologized perceptions of Irish soldiers in order to rationalize Irish participation in the Great War. I use the 1745 Battle of Fontenoy as a lens to study what I term 'the myth of the Irish soldier,' drawing on George Mosse's model of mythologization and the continual refashioning of myth to suit new purposes. In *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (discussed in more detail in chapter one), Mosse analyzed the memorialization of the Great War, particularly in Germany; he suggested that "those concerned with the image and

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[31] "Army Form B 104-82, 11 April 1917," NAM. 2001-11-39-4, Study Collection, National Army Museum. https://collection.nam.ac.uk/detail.php?acc=2001-11-39-4.

[32] Jeffery, "The Irish Military Tradition and the British Empire," 118.

[33] Thomas P. Dooley, *Irishmen or English Soldiers?: Times and World of a Southern Catholic Irish Man (1876-1916) Enlisting in the British Army During the First World War* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), 38, 37.

the continuing appeal of the nation worked at constructing a myth," one that elevated the experience of war in order to justify loss, sacrifice, and the nation itself.[34] Using his framework I argue that, over the centuries, Irish soldiers were perceived to possess unique fighting abilities and innate military valor and success; however, rhetorical depictions of the Irish soldier shifted according to changes in Ireland's relationship with Great Britain. Frequently, the Irish soldier was described as fighting injustice and oppression, often by fighting against England in foreign armies. By the First World War, however, the 'myth of the Irish soldier' had been continually reworked in nationalist rhetoric and formed a crucial aspect of Irish identity, so nationalist leaders could use it to encourage Irish Catholic nationalists to enlist even in the British army.

Then, in the second chapter, I study how the Irish Catholic soldiers of the First World War perceived themselves and their own military participation in relation to their Irish Protestant and English counterparts within the ranks. I suggest that a shared Irish "martial spirit" was common among Irish soldiers, regardless of religious or political affiliation. As a result, national distinctions between Irish and English soldiers were most prevalent; religious or political tensions among Irish soldiers caused less hostility within the ranks. The 1916 Rising and executions led to a temporary increase in tensions, but these tensions seem to have been merely suppressed rather than truly forgiven.

As mentioned above, my work and methodology is closely related to that of Niamh Gallagher in *Ireland and the Great War*. Because her work focused on middle- and lower-class Catholics who might not have been literate, Gallagher did not rely only on their own written documents but also referred to administrative records such as the 1911 census to determine

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[34] George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 6.

religious affiliation and newspaper articles to illustrate broader patterns of behavior. I take a similar approach in this thesis. Because religious and political affiliation did not always coincide—for example, although many Irish Catholics held nationalist sympathies, not *all* did—I determine each soldiers' religious and political affiliation based on how they explicitly described themselves, either on census returns, attestation or enlistment records, or in documents such as letters or diaries.

Gallagher and Catriona Pennell also acknowledged the value of newspapers in illustrating public opinion, and Gallagher especially noted their value in illuminating the behavioral trends for a population with a significant rate of illiteracy.[35] My work draws heavily on digitized Irish newspapers from 1914 to 1918 in order to analyze the language used in recruiting drives, in descriptions of the war, and in reprinted soldiers' letters. Such publications from the north and south of Ireland include *Belfast Newsletter*, *Derry Journal, Drogheda Independent* in County Louth, *Kerry Press*, and the moderate nationalist *Freeman's Journal*. I compare the language and speeches printed in these publications with several British newspapers such as the London *Evening Standard*, *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette*, and the Scottish *Strathearn Herald*.

My thesis also relies on Irish soldiers' and chaplains' letters and diaries as well as digitized or published newspapers and diaries. The majority of these individuals were Catholic, but I also discuss Protestant Irish soldiers, particularly in chapter two. These sources come from published memoirs, the National Archives of Ireland, the respective archives of the National Library of Ireland, Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin, the Imperial War Museum in London, and the National Army Museum in London. These archival collections

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[35] Gallagher, *Ireland and the Great War*, 10.

rarely included full correspondence or diaries spanning multiple years or even multiple months; soldiers frequently became casualties and stopped writing due to wounds or death, or their documents were simply lost. This is particularly true of rank-and-file, as officer's letters and diaries were more likely to be preserved and donated to archives like the ones above. As a result, the written sources from soldiers used in this thesis tend to come from NCOs or commissioned officers. Additionally, although I reference several northern newspapers, my thesis focuses heavily on southern Ireland and the preponderance of southern sources reflects that geographic distinction.

Although personal documents such as letters and memoirs are written for an audience—whether for one's family and friends, or for a general readership—and may reflect a sanitized version of the war experience, these sources nonetheless reveal a soldier's personal attitudes better than sources created for a broader public. While it is impossible to know for certain whether the soldier was telling the truth or perhaps trying to comfort loved ones at home, I have taken them at their word unless I have reason to doubt them. In such instances, I specify potential factors which may have influenced their interpretation or depiction of events.

CHAPTER 1: FOR KING OR COUNTRY: FONTENOY AND THE MYTH OF THE IRISH SOLDIER THROUGH THE GREAT WAR

In November 1915, Catholic chaplain Martin Branigan wrote to Irish M.P. John Redmond to congratulate him on successfully encouraging Irish Catholics to join the British army during the First World War: "Under your illuminating leadership from the first moment of War, Irishmen realized that they were asked to support their ancient friends of France + Flanders. The Spirit of Fontenoy was revived."[36] He suggested that Irishmen had enlisted because of successful rhetoric and propaganda drawing on Irish history—in this case, a long history of alliances with France and Flanders. However, the 1745 battle of Fontenoy that Branigan referenced saw Irish brigades fight on the side of France *against* Britain. From the eighteenth to the twentieth century the battle and the courage of the Irish soldiers had featured prominently in Irish rhetoric and cultural memory, often in anti-British, anti-imperial contexts.

However, with the outbreak of World War I and the promise of Home Rule at the war's end, Catholic nationalists such as Redmond instead promoted enlistment in the British Army. Thus, whereas before 1914 Irish Catholics joined the British Army *in spite of* their nationalist sympathies, Great War rhetoric and propaganda which referenced Irish history and the accomplishments of Irish soldiers allowed Irishmen to enlist *because* of their nationalist sympathies. In the absence of official British recruitment efforts in Ireland, Irish Catholic nationalists drew on a mythologized narrative of the past and particularly the deeds of Irish soldiers fighting in France and Flanders against England centuries earlier.

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[36] Correspondence from Rev. Martin Branigan to John Redmond, November 15, 1915, MS 15,261/9/11(1)-MS 15,261/9/11(2), John Redmond Papers, National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

In the late seventeenth century Irish rebels—known as the Wild Geese—had fled to Catholic France after being exiled by the Protestant English King William. Irish brigades formed within the French army and, in May 1745, during the War of Austrian Succession they joined the French forces besieging Tournai (now in Belgium). The British, together with their Dutch, Hanoverian, and Austrian allies, attempted to liberate the town. They were soundly defeated on the battlefield of Fontenoy by a combination of French cavalry attacks, artillery, and infantry with "the Irish Brigade conspicuous among them;" the British and Allied forces suffered about 7000-10,000 casualties, with the French about 5000-7000.[37] As a result, France conquered Flanders. Irish soldiers comprised only a small portion of the victorious French forces at the battle of Fontenoy but, in subsequent centuries, their legacy became an important aspect of Irish nationalist identity.

This chapter examines the development and deployment of a 'myth of the Irish soldier,' particularly as it related to the Battle of Fontenoy. Such rhetoric described innate traits that were said to make Irishmen particularly courageous and successful soldiers; which traits were emphasized fluctuated depending on the conflict and depending on Ireland's colonial circumstances. According to this myth, the Irish soldier possessed the qualities of the masculine military ideal. Across centuries and military engagements, he was loyal, valiant, and steadfast regardless of the cause or king he served. Most depictions focused on the Irish soldier's military success as well, but victory was not necessarily required; courageous effort was sufficient, regardless of the battle's outcome. Although different aspects and characteristics were accentuated as needed to suit the political climate, the essential depiction of the Irish soldier as a

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[37] Russell F. Weigley, *The Age of Battles: The Quest for Decisive Warfare from Breitenfeld to Waterloo* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 207.

timeless military exemplar remained unchanged. This myth was primarily deployed by Catholic nationalists, but unionists and even English publications referred to it—in both positive and negative contexts.

Ireland's tumultuous relationship with Great Britain and the British army forced Irish nationalists to repeatedly refashion the myth of the Irish soldier in their rhetoric from the eighteenth century to the First World War. I suggest that this rhetoric became more explicitly anti-British and anti-imperial, influenced in part by British imperialism and the Home Rule movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, the flexibility of the myth and its establishment in Irish cultural identity over the prior centuries allowed it to be used to *encourage* Irish Catholic and nationalist participation in the British war effort.

Methodology

Scholars have used a mythologized past as a lens through which to study how nationalist populations were motivated to support and justify war. As mentioned in the Introduction, George Mosse's *Fallen Soldiers* provides a useful framework and model for my own research. Before deeply exploring what he called the "Myth of the War Experience" in World War I, Mosse first traced the origins of this myth to earlier wars and the advent of volunteer armies rather than mercenaries. He showed how a myth surrounding volunteer soldiers had sprung up from earlier wars such as the Napoleonic wars, and this myth was continuously refashioned over the decades in order to provide Germany with "a new depth of religious feeling, putting at its disposal ever-present saints and martyrs, places of worship, and a heritage to emulate."[38] German leaders repeatedly provided rhetorical and tangible reminders of war and its apparent

[38] George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 7.

glory. By the outbreak of the First World War, this myth had already become part of Germany's cultural memory and a key element of German national feeling, and it was available for use in pro-war rhetoric and propaganda. While I focus on rhetoric and public conversation—particularly through newspapers—rather than on tangible symbols or concrete enlistment numbers, I will loosely follow Mosse's model to trace the evolution of the 'myth of the Irish soldier' in Irish rhetoric before and during the First World War.

A brief comparison between Scotland and Ireland is also useful, given that both nations had similarly contentious relationships with Great Britain and the broader United Kingdom. Religious differences between Ireland and Scotland proved largely insurmountable, however; to prove its loyalty to Great Britain, Scotland "[displaced] potential national tensions onto the convenient other of Ireland."[39] Historian Terence Denman suggested that Scottish soldiers more often filled the "'martial race' role" in the British forces, and that as a result "there never really developed a cult of the Irish soldier."[40] However, his analysis is based solely on soldiers in the British army. In contrast, I suggest that a 'myth of the Irish soldier' arose *outside* the British forces, and only at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century did it begin to include those Irish soldiers fighting for the empire.

Although the myth was applicable to any conflict and was not solely tied to the Battle of Fontenoy, this battle was frequently referenced to illustrate the deeds of Irish soldiers; as a result, it provides a useful lens for analyzing shifts in rhetoric. Like rhetorical descriptions of the myth

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[39] Gill Plain, "Introduction: Anniversary Culture and the Legacy of Bannockburn," in *Scotland and the First World War: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Bannockburn*, ed. Gill Plain (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2016), xvi.

[40] Terence Denman, "'Ethnic Soldiers Pure and Simple'? The Irish in the Late Victorian British Army," *War in History* 3, no. 3 (July 1996): 254.

of the Irish soldier, the memory of the battle of Fontenoy was flexible, and subsequent retellings and allusions to the battle similarly illustrate shifts in Irish attitudes toward Great Britain.

Building the Myth

Throughout the eighteenth century references to the Battle of Fontenoy appeared in Irish newspapers, and even these earliest references depicted the battle as evidence of Irish fighting ability. The majority of these allusions were made in the context of British conflict with France, when it seemed possible that the Catholic Irish would again assist France because of their shared religion and earlier alliance. For example, in 1757, only twelve years after the battle, the *Belfast Newsletter* published an excerpt of a "private letter from London" which detailed alleged proposals to bolster the number of recruits in the British forces.[41] One such suggestion was to recruit 18,000 Irish Catholics and to allow any Irish Catholics serving in foreign militaries to return and join the British forces instead; once they enlisted in the British military, they would be allowed to practice their religion and receive communion from Catholic priests. If true, this would be a significant concession because, under the Penal Laws of the time, Catholics were barred from the British military and banned from practicing their religion. The letter claimed that the proposal to relax this policy was made in an attempt to ensure British military superiority over France: "If this project should succeed, it will be a fatal stroke to the French, who have always been beat when opposed by Irish troops…; and the French king would have been taken prisoner in the late war, at the battle of Fontenoy, had it not been for the Irish brigades in his pay."[42] The veracity of this proposal is questionable, but its circulation in the public sphere nonetheless suggests a burgeoning recognition of Irish Catholic fighting ability, particularly in

[41] "Dublin, Jan. 15," *Belfast Newsletter*, January 11, 1757, accessed March 27, 2023.
[42] Ibid.

association with their victory at Fontenoy.[43] The author implied that Irish soldiers' bravery and military prowess made them desirable to the British crown, which was apparently willing to make concessions and relax its own laws in order to win their loyalty.

Similar references were made in the 1770s when the American Revolution prompted fears of a French invasion of Ireland in order to attack Great Britain.[44] In August 1779, the *Freeman's Journal* printed the *Address of the Revd. Arthur O'Leary to the Common People of the Roman Catholic Religion*, which urged Irish Catholics not to take up arms or rebel against Britain in the event of a French invasion. O'Leary made his appeal on political and religious grounds, arguing that the French would not honor their shared Catholic religion and that, if Catholics joined a rebellion, the sin of treason would keep them from heaven; however, he also appealed to Irish Catholic military tradition. He argued that Catholics should "remain peaceably in your cottages" unless British laws relaxed and legally allowed Catholic military participation:

> Should the Catholic gentry descended in a long line from the warlike Chieftains and annimated [sic] with the same spirit of courage and magnanimity which crowned with laurels their relations and namesakes on…the plains of Fontenoy, where hands disqualified from using a gun in defence of their native country, have conquered cities and provinces for foreign Kings. Should the Catholic gentry be empowered by [British] Government, or Parliament to join their Protestant neighbours, and press to the standard of their country, at the head of a spirited and active race of men … *Then* join the banners of your country.[45]

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[43] It is true that some branches of the British military began to accept Catholics three years later in 1760, but Catholics were not officially allowed to bear arms and join the British forces until the passage of the Catholic Relief Act of 1793. See Ciarán McDonnell, "Loyalty and Rebellion: Irish soldiers in the British military during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars," British Journal for Military History 8, no. 3 (Nov. 2022): 61-65.

[44] McDonnell, "Loyalty and Rebellion," 63.

[45] "An Address," *Freeman's Journal*, August 28, 1779, accessed March 30, 2023.

O'Leary's appeal, like the anonymous letter from the *Belfast Newsletter*, shows an association between Irish Catholic foreign service, as at Fontenoy, and an innate martial quality unique to the Irish soldier. This points to the beginnings of a perception that Irish Catholics were inherently "warlike," a quality inherited from their ancestors. It also suggests that the Battle of Fontenoy, although less than forty years earlier, had already taken root as a part of Irish history and was memorialized alongside tales of "warlike Chieftains" from a more ancient past.

On the eve of the official union between Great Britain and Ireland—the Act of Union would formally take effect in 1801—even English publications appealed to Irish sentiment by praising the heroism of Irish soldiers, particularly at Fontenoy. In 1786, the London *Public Advertiser* claimed that a recent reorganization of the French military, wherein Irish battalions still serving the French would be formally consolidated into the French army but that they would receive decreased pay, proved clear ingratitude by the French king toward Irish battalions still active in the French army. According to the writer, this reorganization showed that "the battle of Fontenoy, and many others…seem to be totally forgotten [by the French]." The writer himself went on to commend the Irish soldiers: "though abstracted from the very bad cause they bravely fought in, too much praise cannot be given to the Irish brigade."[46]

It is clear that this appeal to Irish heroism was made to gain Irish support for the upcoming Act of Union between Great Britain and Ireland, as the writer further claimed that both Britain and Ireland needed to set aside "rooted prejudices" and that Britain needed to consider Ireland's needs when drafting legislation.[47] Significantly, it seems that the British writer felt that

[46] "Extract of a letter from Paris, July 31," *Public Advertiser* (London), August 7, 1786, accessed September 30, 2022.

[47] Ibid.

the best way to win Irish approval and eliminate "rooted prejudices" was to recognize the success of their soldiers, even when those Irish soldiers had fought *against* the British at Fontenoy. This suggests that the story of Fontenoy and the myth of the Irish soldier already formed a crucial element of Irish identity.

For much of the nineteenth century, nationalist rhetorical references to Fontenoy and a mythologized Irish soldier were less common. This is significant, given that in the first half of the century, Irishmen comprised nearly half of the soldiers of the British army.[48] This supports the idea that nationalists at this time primarily perceived the myth in anti-English contexts. They had tended to emphasize Irish soldiers' participation in *foreign* service, especially against Britain; with so much Irish participation in the British army at the time, the myth was less useful for nationalist ends. Additionally, the repeal of the Penal Laws in Ireland coupled with increased rights for Irish Catholics in the early nineteenth century may have prompted more emphasis on politics rather than on military exploits or the history of Irish opposition to Britain.

However, references to the battle were rampant in poetry and artistic output during the mid-nineteenth-century Celtic Revival, which emphasized the preservation of Irish culture and history. Both Catholic and Protestant Irish writers reworked and romanticized existing stories—including that of Fontenoy. For example, in the 1840s multiple poems describing the battle were printed in Irish newspapers.[49] The *Nation* replied to a reader's inquiry in 1847 and informed him that there were four paintings at Versailles depicting the battle, one of which focused on the Irish

[48] Estimates show that in 1830, for example, Irish soldiers comprised 42.2% of the British army. See Denman, "'Ethnic Soldiers Pure and Simple,'" 262.

[49] See "Fontenoy," *Nation*, February 3, 1844, accessed March 31, 2023. See also "'The Brigade' at Fontenoy," *Nation*, May 17, 1845, accessed March 31, 2023.

Brigade: "some of the young Irish artists, studying in the Louvre, ought to copy this picture, and exhibit it in Ireland."[50]

International conflicts and increased Irish emigration led to a resurgence of the Fontenoy narrative as well as the myth of the Irish soldier in the second half of the nineteenth century. Irish immigrants fighting in the American Civil War not only compared their military successes to the historic victory at Fontenoy, but they also framed these successes as a continuation of the tradition of Irish military service abroad. Jerome Deady—who "had been a soldier in the British service, had been in the Irish Brigade in Italy, and finally joined the American army"—wrote to a friend in County Cork in 1863 that the Irish soldiers in the Union army "'have gone through every battle which has been fought in the peninsula of Virginia, with honour and victory, and have well sustained the fame their forefathers won upon the plains of Fontenoy.'"[51]

A meeting of Irish soldiers of the Massachusetts Regiment in 1896 similarly claimed participation in a long tradition of Irish military success in foreign armies. Speaker Joseph Smith drew parallels between Irish soldiers who had fought in the American Civil War and Irish soldiers fighting against the British in the American Revolution. He claimed that even in America Irish soldiers were motivated by the memory of ancestral victory and British oppression; while fighting in the United States, "they could see the wasted fields and tortured children of Ireland…the battle-cry of the brigade at Fontenoy rang in their ears." More than that, however, Smith attributed Irish successes to their being a "military race" naturally suited to fighting:

> They are proud, sensitive, enthusiastic; …they have the imagination that inspires and the courage that dares, united with the faith and fidelity that survive defeat and defy

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[50] "Answers to Correspondents," *Nation*, October 30, 1847, accessed March 31, 2023.
[51] "The War in America," *Irish Examiner*, April 15, 1863, accessed March 27, 2023.

> destruction. These are the native qualities of the race. …These Irish qualities must be infused with the fires of patriotism, with the flames of some good and true cause, and be beaten and welded by the hammer and anvil of discipline and obedience to produce the metal that makes the soldier. … These can make the Irish nation. With them the race can be welded into invincible armies.[52]

Crucially, Smith suggested that inherent racial characteristics made the Irish naturally successful soldiers. The combination of Irish traits such as courage, faith, and loyalty with military discipline, patriotism, and a just cause elevated Irish soldiers above all others and made them "invincible" in battle.

Similar claims had already been made in Ireland as well. In 1870, during the Franco-Prussian War, the *Dundalk Democrat* claimed that France hoped for Irish assistance because the Irish "are undoubtedly the best soldiers in the world;" however, the British policy of neutrality prevented Irish participation. The writer urged his Irish readership to assist France nonetheless, and he appealed to Irish history and their heroic reputation:

> If, contrary to the neutrality proclamation, an Irish Brigade appears on French soil, we hope they will prove a credit to their country, and the martial renown of their race. The Old Irish Brigade and its valour should be constantly before their minds; and it would do them no harm to reflect occasionally on their exploits at Fontenoy … If they assist in a similar manner now in driving the Prussians from France, civilization, justice and true liberty will be largely indebted to their bravery.[53]

Here, too, Irish soldiers were depicted as having a natural fighting ability and bringing pride to Ireland and the Irish people as a whole through their long history of military successes.

Not only were Irish soldiers described as possessing innate fighting ability, but they were also elevated to "the best soldiers in the world." Additionally, although they were praised for

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[52] "The Story of Irish Valour," *Nation*, September 5, 1896, accessed March 30, 2023.
[53] "An Irish Brigade," *Dundalk Democrat*, October 8, 1870, accessed March 27, 2023.

their ability to successfully serve in any army or conflict, the examples given in the newspapers above emphasize that the mythic Irish soldier fought for honorable reasons, whether in a "good and true cause" in America or for "civilization, justice and true liberty" in France. In these instances, the myth was referenced to illustrate the 'goodness' of the respective cause. However, these varied causes also demonstrate the flexibility of the myth and the intense loyalty of the mythologized Irish soldier, who could apparently serve with equal valor in any militia—be it a French army, an American army, or even in a civil war.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the memory of Fontenoy and the exploits of past Irish soldiers formed the basis for Irish nationalist identity. According to a writer for the *Dublin Penny Journal* in 1883, "associating the glorious feats of arms of their expatriated countrymen with the renown of the soldiers of France, the [Irish] child inherited the predilections of the father for the warriors of that nation."[54] The writer suggested that the mythologized soldiers embodied Irish aspirations of nationhood, and shared pride in their heroism formed the basis of Irish identity. Shared cultural heritage and pride in Irish soldiers allowed the Irish to "equally [participate] in the [soldiers'] triumph."[55]

Refashioning the Myth

The nature of colonial conflict as well as the Home Rule debate at the turn of the century forced a reinterpretation of the myth of the Irish soldier. Increasing anti-English sentiment among Irish nationalists had negatively influenced perceptions of the British empire and army into the twentieth century. From 1878 to 1913 the percentage of Irishmen in the British military dropped

[54] "Landing of the French at Killala." *Dublin Penny Journal*, June 1, 1833, accessed September 30, 2022.

[55] Ibid.

from 22 percent to nine percent.[56] This is not to say that nationalist rhetoric alone caused this decline in enlistment, but it is true that nationalist rhetoric largely opposed Irish Catholic enlistment to the British military. However, this does not suggest that Irish Catholics did not take pride in the British Empire or participate in imperialism: "a latent conflict of loyalties existed. … The same man could applaud the imperial feats of the Irish in the British army but just as readily denounce it as the occupying force of an alien power."[57]

Nationalist politicians generally condemned the Boer War as British tyranny, for example, but they were also willing to boast about the bravery and martial qualities of the Irish serving in South Africa. The Second Boer War (1899-1902) saw Great Britain attempt to gain political authority in the Boer republics of South Africa in order to gain access to the profitable gold mines in the region.[58] At the start of the conflict in 1899, Irish soldiers comprised about thirteen percent of the British army.[59] During this time Irishmen seemed to have joined the British forces primarily for economic or practical reasons, not out of patriotic fervor. One Irish soldier allegedly swore his oath of loyalty to the queen but warned the recruiting officer that if Great Britain acted against Ireland, "'I will be the first that will raise my sword to fight against her,' and in this regard he was sure that he would have 'plenty of Irishmen at my side, for they are known to be the bravest race in the world.'"[60] Crucially, Irish soldiers fought on both sides

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[56] Thomas P. Dooley, *Irishmen or English Soldiers?: Times and World of a Southern Catholic Irish Man (1876-1916) Enlisting in the British Army During the First World War* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), 40.

[57] Ibid., 37.

[58] Peter Henshaw, "The Origins of the Boer War," in *The International Impact of the Boer War*, ed. Keith Wilson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 9.

[59] Denman, "'Ethnic Soldiers Pure and Simple,'" 257.

[60] Peter Karsten, "Irish Soldiers in the British Army, 1792-1922: Suborned or Subordinate?" *Journal of Social History* 17, no. 1 (1983): 31.

of the Boer conflict; some fought in the British army, while others formed Irish battalions alongside the Boers. As a result, nationalists adapted their rhetorical references to the myth of the Irish soldier in order to accommodate changing circumstances.

Officially, Irish newspapers and nationalist leaders continued to denounce the conflict in South Africa and instead praised the Irish brigades fighting alongside the Boers against the British. Newspaper reporters and soldiers alike compared the Irish brigade in South Africa to the Irish at Fontenoy. In a letter to the *Freeman's Journal* in January 1900, a delegate of the Transvaal Irish brigade recounted that "the boys were in great humour… and the word was passed, 'One more cheer for another Fontenoy!' And, sure enough, we had a small Fontenoy very soon, for in the first engagement we had with the English we took a couple hundred of them prisoners."[61] Similarly, in November the *Dundalk Democrat* printed a letter from an Irish soldier fighting alongside the Boers, with the headline "The New Irish Brigade: The Battle of Dundee – A Modern Fontenoy."[62]

They emphasized parallels between the two conflicts; in both, Irish soldiers had joined a foreign army in a distant land, and both Irish brigades were fighting against the English and apparent injustice. In February 1900, *Western People* noted that "the Irish people, from the beginning of the war in South Africa, have protested against its iniquity and injustice." The writer praised Irish soldiers who had joined the Boers, concluding that "the honor of a nation is preserved by the heroism and sacrifices of men like John McBride and the gallant brigade he is

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[61] "The Transvaal Irish Brigade," *Freeman's Journal*, January 3, 1900, accessed March 27, 2023.

[62] "The New Irish Brigade: The Battle of Dundee – A Modern Fontenoy," *Dundalk Democrat*, January 27, 1900, accessed March 10, 2023.

leading in the Transvaal. They fight for freedom in the true sense."[63] The writer suggested that the Irish soldiers' service in a righteous cause upheld the honor of Ireland as a whole.

Although this writer pointed out that this Irish brigade fought for "freedom," political developments soon prompted nationalists to acknowledge Irish soldiers' loyalty and bravery on *both* sides of the conflict, not just the side that nationalists found more sympathetic. This was a contrast from late-nineteenth-century rhetoric, when nationalist leaders had frequently presented the myth of the Irish soldier in the context of a righteous or just cause, often fighting against British or imperial aggression. This change cannot be explained solely as a response to Irish soldiers fighting on both sides of the Boer conflict. Irish enlistment in the British army had in fact decreased throughout the nineteenth century, and in 1900 the number of Irish soldiers in the British forces was nearly at its lowest point since 1830.[64] Instead, it is likely that the growing Home Rule movement inspired Irish nationalists to emphasize Irish contributions in the British forces for two possible reasons. First, nationalists may have praised these soldiers in order to suggest that their loyalty to the crown ought to be rewarded with Irish self-government. Second, this acknowledgement of Irish soldiers in the British army allowed them to claim participation and an equal share in the empire. Irish nationalists still discouraged Irish participation in British colonial conflicts on the basis that the British imperial cause was oppressive; however, nationalist leaders praised the accomplishments and prowess of Irish soldiers fighting in the British army *against* the Boers as well, and nationalist rhetoric adapted to accommodate them in the myth.

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[63] "Column Describing South Mayo Election," *Western People*, February 24, 1900, accessed March 27, 2023.

[64] Denman, "'Ethnic Soldiers Pure and Simple,'" 262.

Comparing rhetoric from the late nineteenth century and reports from the Boer War illustrates this change. In 1874 the *Nation* reported that the London *Times* had recently printed an account of Irish bravery and victory at Fontenoy, apparently in the hopes of encouraging Irish enlistment in the British forces. The writer for the *Nation* commented that English commendation would have little effect on Irish recruitment for colonial wars: "The spirit of the Irish race is the same to-day as it proved itself at Fontenoy; the same in bravery, the same in passionate hatred of subjection. Recruiting sergeants know how bare a market this country is for them."[65] The writer accepted the *Times'* praise and acknowledged the martial qualities of Irish soldiers; however, he simultaneously claimed that the Irish victory at Fontenoy was borne not only from natural ability but also from "a passionate hatred of subjection." It is unclear whether "subjection" described Irish participation in the British forces or the outcome of British imperialism; regardless, the claim illustrates nationalist emphasis of a just cause in the myth of the Irish soldier in the late nineteenth century.

During the Boer War, nationalist publications continued to express regret for Irish participation in the British army; however, they also boasted about the feats of these Irish soldiers who, despite their participation in an imperial cause, were nonetheless linked to Irish military tradition because of their success. A writer for the *Freeman's Journal* in March 1900 lamented the success of Irish soldiers fighting against the Boers, stating that "the imagination and enthusiasm of the venerable Queen of England and of her people have been startled by Celtic valour. The spear with which the gallant Boer was struck down was forged in no English forge; it

[65] "Notes," *Nation*, July 4, 1874, accessed March 27, 2023.

was unhappily purely Celtic in its make."[66] It is possible that this was a literal reference to weapons manufacture but, given the article's exclusive focus on Celtic and particularly Irish military accomplishments, in this context it is more likely that the writer was referring to the spear as a metaphor for Irish fighting ability. Although Ireland provided only a portion of the British fighting force, this writer claimed that the Boer forces were "struck down" by Irish skill and Irish soldiers who "did all the hard fighting and suffered all the loss in the fight," *not* English.[67] Despite expressing regret for Irish participation—and victories—against the Boers, several sentences later he proudly noted that "the Boers were at last driven from their almost inaccessible vastnesses by that same irresistible Irish charge which broke the British column at Fontenoy."[68] Whereas nineteenth-century writers had claimed that a just cause was required for Irish soldiers to be "invincible" in battle, this writer depicted *all* Irish soldiers as unbeatable warriors. These soldiers, too, were likened to the past Irishmen at Fontenoy, despite fighting for the 'wrong' cause.

Nationalists explicitly described their mixed feelings toward the Irish soldiers in the British army and their place in the empire. The queen's visit to Ireland as a public display of gratitude in early 1900 was particularly controversial; nationalists described "'mingled feelings of gratitude and displeasure'" regarding the visit. They were grateful for "'a somewhat tardy

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[66] "The Wearing of the Green," *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin, Ireland), March 19, 1900, accessed September 24, 2022.

[67] Statistics from historian Peter Robinson suggest that the British army in South Africa reached about 246,000 soldiers during the Boer War; although Terence Denman claimed that Irish soldiers comprised a "significant portion" of the British army fighting the Boers, he placed the number of Irish troops at only around 30,000. See Peter Robinson, "The Search for Mobility During the Second Boer War," *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 86, no. 346 (Summer 2008): 145. See also Denman, "'Ethnic Soldiers Pure and Simple,'" 267.

[68] "The Wearing of the Green."

personal acknowledgement of Irish soldiers' valour and good faith in circumstances singularly calculated to test their loyalty,'" presumably referring to the Irish soldiers' service fighting *for* British imperialism; at the same time, however, the visit "'sprang from [the queen's] gratitude for services of which, though done in the discharge of duty, the country is ashamed.'"[69] Although they continued to distance themselves from British imperialism, nationalist leaders accepted and praised the official recognition of Irish soldiers' loyalty and bravery. They had adapted their rhetoric to depict military service for Britain as part of the myth of the Irish soldier, and they suggested that the Irish soldiers' loyalty to Britain was all the more admirable *because* of the cause for which they fought.

Tellingly, the same writer concluded that "'pending the concession of self-government…we cannot, as a people, take any pride or interest in an Empire in which we feel ourselves to be rather subjects than citizens.'"[70] The loyalty of Irish soldiers serving Great Britain not only reflected well on Ireland and Irish bravery, but it also supported nationalist claims that Ireland deserved Home Rule in return for faithful military service. As mentioned in the Introduction, late-nineteenth-century Irish nationalism was calculated to gain broad popular support and appeal to the widest interests; it is possible that nationalists at the turn of the century were using the same tactic to gain support even from Irish soldiers loyal to Britain.

Later nationalists suggested a different reason for Irish service to Britain in the Boer War. Reminiscing on the Boer conflict, an October 1914 letter to the *Southern Star* by C. Diamond noted the apparent contradiction that despite their opposition to the British cause, Irish nationalists "have been constantly ready to hold up their [Irish soldiers'] enlistment and their

[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.

bravery as arguments in favour of Ireland's rights, and as proof of her loyalty! Surely an extraordinary inconsitsency? [sic]"[71] However, he claimed that, although their sympathy was on the side of the Boers, Irish soldiers had participated in British imperialism solely because of their inherent military fervor. As in many prior instances they fought on both sides of the conflict, not because the cause was good, but "for fighting sake."[72]

Specifically, he argued that because they were "a fighting race," the Irish had joined the British forces simply for the opportunity to fight; they had served Britain "with the traditional courage of their race, even when their valour brought no amelioration and no benefit to Ireland."[73] The martial qualities described were no longer those of a good soldier and seemed to be almost a detriment, according to Diamond. Additionally, the alleged martial traits were now applied to the Irish as a whole. This perception reflects later rhetorical trends during the Home Rule movement. As discussed in the Introduction, the third Home Rule bill had been introduced in 1912; its passage would establish the creation of a separate Irish parliament, although this parliament and Ireland itself would remain part of the United Kingdom. Ulster Unionists—predominantly Protestant northern Irish who wished to remain united with Great Britain—feared that the passage of a Home Rule bill would allow the Catholic majority to dominate and oppress Protestants, and they derisively labelled Home Rule "Rome Rule."[74]

Anti-Home Rule propaganda in Ulster and in Great Britain alluded to the myth of the Irish soldier, but with negative racial connotations. Like the above letter by C. Diamond,

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[71] C. Diamond, "A New Era," *Southern Star*, October 17, 1914, accessed April 1, 2023.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Lauren O'Hagan, "'Home Rule is Rome Rule': exploring anti-Home Rule postcards in Edwardian Ireland," *Visual Studies* 35, no. 4 (2020): 338.

opponents of Home Rule suggested that martial qualities inherent to the Irish *race*—not only Irish soldiers—made Irish Catholics dangerous and unsuited to self-government. A letter published in the Scottish *Strathearn Herald* in February 1914 predicted rampant chaos and violence should Home Rule be implemented in Ireland: "It is in the nature of the Irish Celt to love any form of fighting. Cruelty does not enter into his calculation. …Protestants stand aloof from all these things, but possibly under Home Rule they would be forced to join in." This negative depiction of Irish Catholics was presented in contrast with Protestants in Ulster who the writer accepted as "part and parcel of the British race."[75]

Anti-Home Rule propaganda printed in the *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette* in May 1914 claimed that if Home Rule was implemented, Ireland would be ruled by "men who did their worst for the British at FONTENOY, fighting on the side of the French." This propaganda emphasized Irish soldiers' role in defeating Britain at the battle of Fontenoy, and it cast Ireland as a violent enemy of Great Britain. The paper concluded by asking readers: "Would you put Ireland into the hands of these men, who are always ready to support the enemies of Britain, and who would be a constant menace to our safety?" [76] The propaganda suggested that anyone who supported or took pride in Fontenoy—namely, Irish Catholics—was a potential traitor and inherently anti-British.

Deploying the Myth

The outbreak of war in August 1914 brought a resurgence of the myth of the Irish soldier in nationalist rhetoric; crucially, this rhetoric now encouraged Irish enlistment into the British army.

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[75] "Irish Home Rule," *Strathearn Herald,* February 14, 1914, accessed March 10, 2023.

[76] "The Nationalists' Record," *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette*, May 29, 1914, accessed September 25, 2022.

In his letter printed in September 1914, C. Diamond praised nationalist leaders who "[showed] the highest wisdom" in supporting the Allied cause and appealing to prior Irish military tradition to promote enlistment. He claimed that, in contrast with Irish opposition to earlier "English wars in which Irishmen have borne such a glorious part," the Great War marked "a new era" in which nationalists at home could wholeheartedly *support* Irish soldiers serving in the British forces.[77] Similar sentiments were expressed even in November 1915, when the *Freeman's Journal* echoed a claim originally printed in the English *New Statesman* that "'this is the first war in history in which the Irish soldier has fought as an Irishman on the same side as England.'"[78]

Given the intensity of religious and political division in Ireland in the years preceding the First World War, it is easy to understand why Irish Catholic support for the war was unexpected. Certainly, the enthusiastic support of prominent nationalists such as John Redmond seemed to be a dramatic change in attitude. In the years preceding World War I, as the third Home Rule bill gained traction in Parliament, the question of Home Rule had become increasingly contentious.[79] Even pro-war Irish leaders remarked throughout the war that Irish nationalists supporting and fighting for Great Britain was unusual. According to W. T. Skeffington at a 1916 New Year's banquet in Drogheda, before the war "it had been the opinion of many Englishmen, Scotsmen,

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[77] Diamond, "A New Era."

[78] "The Dublins at Suvla Bay," *Freeman's Journal*, November 22, 1915, accessed March 1, 2023.

[79] Edward Carson, the leader of the Ulster Unionists, established the armed Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) to forcibly prevent the enactment of Home Rule in Ulster. In response, John Redmond formed the Irish Volunteers to defend the bill. The UVF imported 35,000 rifles into Ulster in June 1914; when Irish National Volunteers attempted the same in Dublin the following month, British soldiers fired into the gathered crowd, "killing three and wounding thirty-seven." See Thomas Hennessey, *Dividing Ireland: World War One and Partition* (London: Routledge, 1998), 43-45.

and, indeed, Irishmen, that in any great conflict in which England was involved, Ireland could not be depended upon to take her place as a fighting force and a nation in the British empire."[80]

This perceived separation between Great Britain and Ireland may help explain Britain's failure to implement adequate recruitment schemes and propaganda in Ireland. Great Britain began establishing propaganda and recruitment agencies in the United Kingdom shortly after the declaration of war; recruitment centers were established in Ireland, but the island was largely excluded from official British propaganda campaigns. Despite this delay, from August to October 1914 more than 37,000 Irishmen volunteered for the British military: an "immediate increase in army recruiting to a level more than fifty times its pre-war equivalent."[81] The British government nonetheless expressed concerns about unsatisfactory enlistment and enthusiasm in Ireland. The rate of recruitment in Ireland remained fairly steady, but the figures lagged when compared with enlistment numbers in Great Britain. Nearly six percent of eligible Irishmen had enlisted by November 1914, compared with 14 percent in England and Wales and nearly seventeen percent in Scotland.[82]

However, because there was no concerted British recruitment effort in Ireland, the work of recruitment was primarily done by local leaders and media. Not until 1915 did Britain establish the Central Council for the Organisation of Recruitment in Ireland (CCORI), based on the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee (PRC) in Great Britain, and the organization did not begin "distributing recruiting propaganda" until the summer of 1915.[83] John Redmond wrote to

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[80] "New Year's Day in Drogheda," *Drogheda Independent*, January 8, 1916, accessed March 1, 2023.

[81] Timothy Bowman et al., *The Disparity of Sacrifice: Irish Recruitment to the British Armed Forces, 1914-1918* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 43.

[82] Ibid., 60.

[83] Ibid., 141.

the Secretary of the War Office in February 1915 and noted that enlistment numbers had decreased because Great Britain had not undertaken any serious recruitment efforts or agencies in Ireland. However, he cautioned that English recruitment methods would not be effective in Ireland. Instead, if Irish recruitment drives and propaganda referenced nationalist history and inspired "the patriotism of the young men of the country," far more Irish Catholics would join the British forces.[84]

Catholic priests and even Irish Catholic soldiers echoed Redmond's claim that no recruitment effort could be effective if it did not reference the history of Irish nationalists. They insisted that British propaganda methods and rhetoric could not be used to induce Irish Catholics to enlist; rather, propaganda and rhetoric needed to be directed to the Irish and their history. Many of these individuals specifically suggested that pro-war propaganda and rhetoric in Ireland should reference military history such as the Battle of Fontenoy and the exploits of the Wild Geese in France. Irish Catholic chaplain Martin Branigan, ministering to wounded soldiers in England, wrote to John Redmond on 15 November 1915; he praised Redmond's own recruitment efforts and references to the historic Irish brigades in France, but he stated that "recruiting in Ireland would be even more topping if France + Flanders were more often invoked."[85]

An English political pamphlet written in a retroactive attempt to identify the causes of the 1916 Easter Rising similarly lamented Britain's failure to reference Irish history in recruitment efforts: "the influence of that factor of the French tradition—perhaps the most powerful factor in determining at the outset on which side Ireland should stand in this quarrel—was never formally

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[84] Correspondence from John Redmond to Sir Reginald Brade, February 24, 1915, MS 15,261/2/11(7), John Redmond Papers, National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[85] Correspondence from Rev. Martin Branigan to John Redmond, November 15, 1915, MS 15,261/9/11(2).

invoked and systematically exploited." The author ruefully added that Patrick Sarsfield, a commander of the seventeenth-century Irish exiles, ought to have been metaphorically "[summoned]…as a recruiting agent in Nationalist Ireland."[86]

In the absence of official British recruitment schemes, Irish Catholic nationalists created their own recruitment rhetoric, and Ireland's mythologized past and military heroes played a crucial role in attracting Irish support for the Allied cause. With the invasion of France and eventually the outbreak of war in August 1914, both the tale of Fontenoy and the myth of the Irish soldier took on additional significance. In prewar rhetoric, nationalist leaders emphasized Britain's role as the enemy of the exiled Irish at Fontenoy; during the First World War, however, anti-English sentiment was downplayed as nationalists instead emphasized the historic alliance between Ireland and France. The suggestion that Irish soldiers—now, serving in the British army—would be once again coming to the aid of Catholic France allowed Irish nationalists to justify their participation while simultaneously preserving their claims of Irish autonomy and nationhood.

In a 1915 recruitment speech to Irish immigrants in Manchester, John Redmond assured the crowd that enlistment into the British forces during the present war was "in keeping with the history and traditions of the Irish race. In fighting for the [British] Empire the Irishmen knew that they were fighting for Ireland. Every Irish soldier who gave his life on the battlefield died for Ireland as truly as any of Ireland's martyrs in the past. (Cheers.)"[87] Redmond seemed to metaphorically absolve nationalists of any guilt they may have felt in supporting a British cause.

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[86] Warre B. Wells, *An Irish Apologia: Some Thoughts on Anglo-Irish Relations and the War* (Dublin: Maunsel & Co., Ltd., 1917), 44.

[87] "Irishmen and the Army," *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, March 15, 1915, accessed March 10, 2023.

He connected present enlistment into the British army with Ireland's long history of military feats, while also assuring listeners that Irish soldiers fought for *Ireland*, not for the British empire. This may have been because the Home Rule bill had already passed and he wanted to emphasize that Ireland had an equal share in the empire, or because their sacrifice might secure Home Rule for Ireland after the war. Regardless of Redmond's reasoning, the Irish public accepted his claim. In October 1916, for example, the *Westmeath Examiner* printed a list of local soldiers who had been killed in the war. Among the dead was seventeen-year-old Private Thomas Murtagh, killed in action in France the month before; his father, "who sends particulars [of Thomas Murtagh's death], adds—'He was one of those who died in defence of Ireland.'"[88]

Irish soldiers themselves seem to have accepted this justification as well. Sometime before his death at St. Eloi on 7 February 1915 Corporal Michael Murphy of 1st Battalion Royal Irish Regiment described his attitude toward the war and referenced the historic battle in a letter to his sister:

> This is an outrageously unjust war. Very glad to hear that…Harry [has] joined the Irish Brgd [Brigade] to take part in the fight for liberty and justice. I hope the present day Irish Brigade will be as famed as the one that fought in France in the days that are gone. Let them remember the valour of their ancestors on the battlefield of Fontenoy.[89]

Not only did Murphy suggest that he and his comrades were fighting a righteous war against an "unjust" enemy, but he also neglected to mention the British army at all. In Murphy's description, it was the Irish Brigade, not the British army, that continued the tradition of their ancestors and fought for "liberty and justice."

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[88] "Westmeath Heroes," *Westmeath Examiner,* October 7, 1916, accessed April 12, 2023.

[89] Correspondence from Michael Murphy to Ellie, 1914-1915, NAI/2002/119, Soldiers' Wills, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. http://soldierswills.nationalarchives.ie/reels/sw/MurphyM_E84330.pdf.

Just as Redmond referred to Great War Irish soldiers as participants in the tradition of military valor, nationalist publications similarly appealed to the myth of the Irish soldier which had been established in Irish identity through prior centuries. Many of the alleged traits of the Irish soldier described during World War I had been present in earlier iterations of the myth. In November of 1915, the *Freeman's Journal* reported on the exploits of the Irish soldiers during the war and claimed that a key factor was "'…conscious Irish patriotism—patriotism which is always so much more self-conscious in tragic than in successful countries.'" The writer went on to say that "'the evidence of the national spirit of the Irish troops in crisis after crisis of the present war, in addition to their gaiety, fidelity, and daring, is overwhelming.'"[90]

This emphasis on the Irish soldier's patriotism may have been an intentional attempt by nationalist leaders to counter lingering Irish concerns that enlistment in the British army might constitute betrayal of Ireland. In earlier years, acknowledgement of myth and history was occasionally presented as a way to assuage guilt for enlistment. For example, John Lucy from Cork joined the British forces with his brother in 1912; in his memoir, he recalled swearing the required oath of allegiance to King George V "with some national qualms of conscience." Thus, as a "sop" to their feelings the brothers chose to join a staunchly Irish regiment, the Royal Irish Rifles, to appease their nationalist sympathies.[91]

During the Great War, recruitment rhetoric suggested that enlistment into the British army gave Irishmen the chance to embody the 'myth of the Irish soldier' and join the historic military tradition. In the *Nationalist and Leinster Times* list of "5 Reasons why Irishmen should

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[90] "The Dublins at Suvla Bay."

[91] John F. Lucy, *There's a Devil in the Drum* (Naval & Military Press, 2001. First published 1938), 15-16.

join the Army," printed in March 1915, the fifth reason was that "during this war thousands of Irish soldiers have upheld the reputation of Ireland as one of the great fighting races of the world. Never have Irish soldiers shown greater devotion, more splendid heroism, or more cheerful courage than they have displayed on the fields of Belgium."[92] It is—perhaps intentionally—unclear whether the "fields of Belgium" referred to the present war or to the victories of the Wild Geese in Flanders centuries earlier. Regardless, the myth could support either meaning, and this rhetoric again placed Irish soldiers of the Great War firmly within the established tradition of Irish military valor.

Irish Catholic chaplain Francis Gleeson, stationed in France with the 2nd Royal Munster Fusiliers, seems to have been aware of this, and his journal shows his fervent endeavors to inspire his men—often through nationalist symbols and references to myths such as Fontenoy. He recorded how he encouraged patriotic fervor and, in his homilies, drew parallels between the Munster Fusiliers and Irish soldiers throughout history. On multiple occasions he hung patriotic banners and Irish nationalist flags in the church. His entry for 9 February 1915 reported that during evening prayers the night before, he "drew the men's attention to the four Green flags in the Choir, and reminded them that it was not the first time in history that the Irish flag hung in a French or Belgium [sic] Church." Gleeson then described the effect that the myth's retelling had on the soldiers:

> It is all so full of interest and history for us—a revival of the days of the "Wild Geese"—Told the men that it is not at all improbable that Sarsfield, on his way to Fontenoy, (he landed at Le Harve [sic]), may have heard Mass in this Church, with his Irish soldiers. This moved the men very much and they are beginning to feel as if they had a kind of

[92] "5 Reasons why Irishmen should join the Army," *Nationalist and Leinster Times*, March 27, 1915, accessed February 27, 2023.

> right-of-way all over. [93]

Gleeson's references to Fontenoy were not intended to encourage enlistment but rather to inspire Irish Catholics who had already joined the British army. His account further suggests that these appeals were successful. Like Michael Murphy, however, the soldiers were inspired not by appeals to empire or even the Allied cause—although in later entries Gleeson also mentioned the importance of liberating Belgium from German occupation. Instead, the soldiers were inspired by references to their nation's martial history and the deeds of past Irishmen.

A 1916 article in the *National Volunteer* pointed to a crucial new aspect of the myth of the Irish soldier. Together with typical traits from earlier iterations of the myth such as loyalty, faith, and "an absence of fear," the writer emphasized love of their country's history. Patriotism had appeared in earlier descriptions of the Irish soldier; now, however, appreciation for the military deeds of their ancestors was presented as an essential characteristic which contributed to Irish fighting ability. The *National Volunteer* claimed that:

> From their infancy [Irishmen] have been taught to glory in the deeds of valour of men of Irish birth and Irish blood, not only in their own land, but when, as in the case of the 'Irish Brigades' driven from their country by the events of the Revolution and the Penal Code. It is, indeed, in foreign armies that the real history of Ireland during the first half of the eighteenth century is to be traced. [94]

This writer explicitly stated that military deeds formed the basis of "the real history of Ireland," at least in the early eighteenth century. The article concluded that "temperament, historical

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[93] Diary of Fr. Francis A. Gleeson 7 February 1915 - 3 May 1915, 9 February 1915, transcript, Fr. Francis A. Gleeson Papers, University College Dublin Digital Library, http://digital.ucd.ie/get/ucdlib:37310/content.

[94] "Why Irishmen are Good Soldiers," *National Volunteer,* February 12, 1916, accessed March 1, 2023.

antecedents, and social environments have made the Irish soldier what not only his own countrymen, but Great Britain and the Empire, are proud to think him to-day."[95] In other words, the Irish soldier's success came from innate ability as well as appreciation for Ireland's martial history, and the military valor of Irish soldiers served as proof that Ireland deserved equal standing in the British empire.

Similar sentiments were expressed at a recruiting meeting in Killarney, where the speaker praised the creation of Irish divisions in the British army and declared that "it should be their [Irish soldiers'] pride as well as their duties to join such heroes. … We may be confident that the new Irish Brigade will prove worthy of her elder sister, that famous Brigade whose name has gone down to history linked forever with the glorious memory of Fontenoy. (Loud applause)."[96] For these writers, the Irish soldier should "glory" in the heroism of Irish soldiers of the past, and it was their "duty" to fight as their ancestors did. In this Great War rhetoric, the Irish soldier's love of country was more than mere patriotism. If the deeds of Irish soldiers formed "the real history of Ireland," and true Irish soldiers knew and took pride in their nation's history, it seems that they themselves needed to accept the 'myth of the Irish soldier.'

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Irish cultural memory and historical narrative shifted with colonial circumstance and nationalist goals. Military victories such as the Battle of Fontenoy led to a mythologization of Irish soldiers, who came to symbolize Irish valor, loyalty, and pride. For Irish nationalists, these soldiers also came to embody the Irish claim to nationhood. The

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[95] Ibid.

[96] "Recruiting Meeting in Killarney," *Kerry Advocate,* February 12, 1916, accessed March 31, 2023.

characteristics of the ideal Irish soldier fluctuated during subsequent conflicts, and the story of Fontenoy and the myth of the Irish soldier was repeatedly refashioned in nationalist rhetoric to accommodate Ireland's shifting colonial relationship with Great Britain from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century. By the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, this myth was already embedded in Irish cultural identity, so it could be successfully deployed by nationalist leaders to encourage Irish Catholic enlistment in the British army for the sake of securing Home Rule.

In the eighteenth century, references to Fontenoy and Irish soldiers were primarily made during times of potential alliance between Catholic Ireland and France. The battle of Fontenoy provided evidence of the bravery and abilities of Irish soldiers, and the outcome of the battle was a source of pride for Catholic Ireland. As a result, even Britain occasionally praised the Irish soldiers in hopes of appeasing Ireland and preventing rebellion. In the nineteenth century, despite high numbers of Irish soldiers serving in the British army, nationalist retellings of the myth emphasized that Irish soldiers fought in foreign armies, typically *against* Great Britain and always for a righteous cause. Irish soldiers were said to be the best in the world because of innate martial qualities and apparently unique Irish traits, such as pride, loyalty, and enthusiasm. At the same time, nationalist leaders discouraged Irish Catholics from enlisting in the British forces and cooperating with imperialist goals in any way.

Nationalist goals at the turn of the century required a reworking of this rhetoric. Although Irish nationalists still discouraged Irish enlistment in the British forces, the possibility of Home Rule meant that they also praised Irish successes in the service of the empire. *All* Irish soldiers, regardless of the cause for which they fought, were now included in the myth and participants in the long history of Irish military victory stemming from Fontenoy. At the same time, tensions between Britain and Ireland increased, and the earlier praise for Ireland's alleged

martial abilities turned to racist claims that Irish Catholics were too unruly to be trusted with self-government. By the early twentieth century, Fontenoy had become synonymous with fervent anti-English and anti-imperial sentiment in Catholic Ireland.

With the passage of the Home Rule bill and the promise of an Irish parliament at the war's end in exchange for Irish Catholic support, nationalist aims shifted yet again. Nationalist leaders and Catholic clergy encouraged Irish Catholic recruitment in the British army for the glory and benefit of Ireland. Despite repeated refashioning, the myth of the Irish soldier had been established in Irish identity over the preceding centuries, and it was available for deployment by these leaders. They recycled the same familiar rhetoric and myth to appeal to Irish Catholic pride; now, however, the story of the Irish soldiers at Fontenoy was used to promote enlistment and participation in the British war effort—in stark contrast to the anti-recruitment rhetoric during the Boer War barely a decade earlier. Although British recruitment schemes in Ireland were lackluster during the First World War, appeals to Fontenoy and the valor of Irish soldiers by nationalist leaders and Catholic clergy were successful in promoting enlistment and inspiring the soldiers. Whereas prior iterations of the myth emphasized Irish soldiers in the service of foreign powers, Great War rhetoric was firmly focused on Irish soldiers fighting in the British army. Not only did Irish soldiers embody valor and loyalty, but the final iteration of the myth also required that they too embraced the myth of the Irish soldier.

Nonetheless, the centuries of religious tension and the divisive rhetoric on both sides of the Home Rule debate could not be immediately forgotten. This raises broader questions regarding how World War I affected Catholic Ireland's colonial relationship with both Great Britain and their Protestant Irish comrades. How did Irish Catholic soldiers and Irish Protestant soldiers in the British army navigate this relationship? To what extent did they experience—or

act on—religious or political tensions within the ranks? Did the experience of war or battlefield conditions lessen or intensify these divisions? I will explore these questions in more depth in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2: ENTRENCHED LOYALTIES AND TENSIONS: IDENTITY AND RACE AMONG IRISH SOLDIERS IN WORLD WAR I

Dublin-born Captain William Patrick Hone of the 2nd Canadian Division Engineers described his religion as Church of Ireland on his attestation papers, but his letters suggest that he felt little religious distinction from Catholics.[97] In a letter to his wife in January 1915, Hone wrote, "today I tried to go to Church in a biggish Catholic church while awaiting a message. The Church was nearly full and a very old priest came in + did some movements…but after waiting 20 mins with nothing happening I made off. It is the first time I have been to Church on this side."[98] Although he seemed bored and possibly confused by the proceedings, his description of the religious service was that of a casual observer, with no broader conclusions about Catholicism or Catholics in general. In the same letter, however, Hone considered the possibility of conscription in Ireland and then added, "It is a hard matter and shows a big gulf still separates us from the people of England. I think in a way it is a pity that Ireland could not come under the act as well but undoubtedly it was impracticable."[99] Whereas Hone's description of a Catholic religious service was somewhat indifferent, his description of the English as different from "us" Irish—even Protestant Irish—suggested a potentially irreconcilable distinction between the Irish and English.

Although these sentiments are those of only one soldier, it seems that such attitudes were not uncommon during the Great War among Irish soldiers in the British army, whether Catholic

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[97] "Canada, World War I CEF Attestation Papers, 1914-1918," digital image s.v. "William Patrick Hone," Record Group 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 4930-35, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, *Ancestry.com.*

[98] Correspondence from Patrick Hone to Mary, January 8, 1915, MS 11274/1, Letters of Patrick Hone, Manuscripts & Archives Research Library, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland.

[99] Ibid.

or Protestant. While Irish soldiers acknowledged their own religious and political differences, the shared war effort and a common feeling of Irish pride—possibly stemming from the myth of the Irish soldier—regardless of religion or political affiliation tended to override their differences. I suggest that both Catholic and Protestant Irish soldiers tended to define themselves against the *English* rather than against their Irish counterparts of different denominations or political affiliation. Religious and political tensions between Irish soldiers briefly rose in the aftermath of the Easter Rising in April 1916, but this tension again was suppressed in the later years of the war. This implies more complexity in personal identity and shared Irish patriotism among Irish soldiers than scholars have previously suggested.

Whereas the previous chapter showed how the myth of the Irish soldier was deployed in nationalist rhetoric to encourage Irish enlistment in the Great War, this chapter largely focuses on Irish soldiers themselves, and particularly how their camaraderie within the ranks embodied hopes for Irish unity as the war unfolded. As in chapter one, I look at rhetorical references; however, this chapter also makes heavy use of soldiers' personal writings to analyze the interactions between Catholic and Protestant Irish soldiers as well as their English counterparts. I use letters, diaries, and newspapers to explore how the Allied cause and the shared contributions of Irish soldiers provided a symbol of Irish unity for both Irish soldiers and the Irish population. Then, I use these same sources to show how Irish soldiers within the British army drew on prewar racialized rhetoric and history in order to define themselves in relation to their English comrades. Finally, I examine how the 1916 Rising temporarily amplified these differences; even after the initial shock had faded, the exacerbated tensions gave rise to new, lingering divisions among Irish soldiers.

Methodology

As discussed in the Introduction, D. George Boyce previously pointed out how nineteenth-century nationalism drew on racialized depictions of ancient conflict between "Saxon" English and "Celtic" Irish. He concluded that "it was hostility to England that provided the driving force behind nationalism in Ireland," a hostility which the *Cork Daily Herald* in 1885 attributed to "'this great racial conflict, which has been going on so long, which began in blood and suffering 700 years ago, and has continued through seven centuries of oppression and misery.'"[100] As a result, Home Rule leaders in the early twentieth century had a wealth of imagery to draw on, and this concept of "the two races, Celt and Saxon, locked in mortal combat" pervaded political rhetoric.[101]

In this chapter, I argue that this racialized rhetoric persisted and influenced wartime speeches and Irish soldiers' perceptions of each other and their English comrades. It contributed to a tentative solidarity between Catholic and Protestant Irish soldiers and among the southern Irish populace. Irish soldiers became symbols of cooperation, and they themselves remarked that camaraderie and shared experience tended to quell religious or political divisions within the ranks. At the same time, tensions between Irish and *English* soldiers increased and tended to replace inter-Irish division, particularly among southern Irish soldiers.

Thomas Hennessey's *Dividing Ireland* (discussed in more detail in the Introduction) focused primarily on the growing divide between unionist and nationalist identity during World War I; however, it provides a useful example of a prior study of Irish identity in relation to the war and not solely in the context of postwar nationalism and revolution. Hennessey noted that,

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[100] D. George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (3rd ed., London: Routledge, 1995), 215.
[101] Ibid.

with the exception of radical republicans and Sinn Féin supporters, before World War I Irish and British identities were at odds but were not mutually exclusive, even among Irish nationalists and Home Rule supporters.[102] However, Hennessey largely neglected the sentiments and behavior of Irish soldiers—a significant oversight given that, by some estimates, more than a quarter of the eligible male population in Ireland enlisted during the war.[103]

D. George Boyce also discussed bonds between Irish soldiers in his 2002 work "'That party politics should divide our tents': nationalism, unionism and the First World War." He suggested that the experience of war brought nationalist and unionist Irish soldiers closer together, because it allowed soldiers of vastly different backgrounds to interact and witness each others' traditions. He correctly noted that it was "an essential point of nationalist interpretation of the war to stress that in the trenches, the political differences between nationalist and unionist, Ulsterman and Irishman, quickly vanished."[104] While Boyce is correct to point out the bond between Irish soldiers of differing religious and political backgrounds, he too failed to address the lingering impact of mythic rhetoric of racialized conflict or the presence of English soldiers in creating this bond.

Just as Hennessey described how Catholics were viewed as "other" for British and Ulster Protestants to define themselves against, it seems that during the First World War, southern Irish soldiers defined themselves against the English. The presence of the English within the ranks as an "other" allowed Catholic and Protestant Irish soldiers to bond over their own shared Irishness

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[102] Thomas Hennessey, *Dividing Ireland: World War One and Partition* (London: Routledge, 1998), 41-42.

[103] Keith Jeffery, *1916 A Global History* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 110.

[104] D. G. Boyce, "'That party politics should divide our tents': nationalism, unionism and the First World War," in *Ireland and the Great War: 'A War to Unite Us All?'*, ed. Adrian Gregory and Senia Pašeta (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 197.

and, occasionally, the shared experience of English racialized discrimination. In this chapter, I draw on Boyce's analysis of prewar racialized rhetoric and Hennessey's study of Irish identity during the war. I argue that, as a result of prewar descriptions which highlighted alleged racial distinctions between the English and Irish, as well as wartime rhetoric by Irish leaders which emphasized Irish cooperation and unity, southern Irish soldiers treated English soldiers as "other," not Irish soldiers of differing religion or political affiliation. This suggests that southern unionists and nationalists were not united by a shared sense of British or imperial identity but rather by a shared Irish or ethnic identity.

Inter-Irish Distinctions

Catholic and Protestant Irish soldiers alike described cultural and regional differences between themselves and their counterparts. Significantly, these differences and inter-Irish tensions were strongest while soldiers were in barracks or training within Ireland, before they were sent to the front and exposed to trench and combat conditions. For example, in his memoir Corporal John Lucy, a Catholic from Cork in the 2nd Royal Irish Rifles, acknowledged differences of religion and politics among the ranks; these differences were especially clear in a regiment such as the Royal Irish Rifles, which recruited primarily in Ulster but included both Protestants and Catholics. While in training in Belfast before the outbreak of war, Lucy described his northern comrades as "frightfully ignorant, and slow and stupid in the classroom" due to their lack of childhood education, although he also noted that they "more than made up for their failing…by being slick and smart on the barrack-square."[105] He even described physical altercation within the unit; one dispute began when a soldier from Derry taunted Lucy by singing a unionist song

[105] John F. Lucy, *There's a Devil in the Drum* (Naval & Military Press, 2001. First published 1938), 43.

called *The Boyne Water*, and the two came to blows.[106] However, Lucy also retroactively justified these disputes as the natural consequence of "the repressive system of training which robbed us of our independence," which thus resulted in "a certain amount of self-assertion in quarrelling amongst ourselves."[107]

More significantly, Lucy also described tensions among the civilian population in Belfast, where the unit was quartered:

> Slogans: 'To hell with the Pope', and 'No Rome rule', were white-washed on the gable ends of the houses in the poorer districts. Bigotry reigned here, surviving ironically in Ireland's quarter of progress. … We saw with regret that some Catholics living here seemed just as much embittered as their Protestant neighbors. This was foreign and galling to men of the south, who are friendly and tolerant towards their Protestant countrymen.[108]

It is important to note that Lucy's memoir was published in the 1930s, and postwar events may have influenced his recollection and perception of tolerance and religious cooperation in his native Cork. However, contemporary newspapers support his assessment of the tense religious and political climate in the north of Ireland at the beginning of the First World War. An article from the *Derry Journal* in April 1915 claimed that a recruit had been rejected in Belfast because he was Roman Catholic; the writer noted that "the position of the [Protestant] warriors in Belfast may become rather embarrassing" on the battlefield, as most Belgians and French were Catholic as well. He rhetorically questioned whether the Protestant soldiers would be willing to fight alongside Britain's Catholic allies, and concluded, "I have no doubt they would—for in what

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[106] Ibid., 43-44.
[107] Ibid., 43.
[108] Ibid., 46.

may be called the brotherhood of the battlefield differences, which seem vital at home, are soon forgotten whether they are finally abandoned or not."[109]

In contrast, southern newspapers do suggest a greater degree of religious and political cooperation. In February 1915, the *Sligo Champion* reported that Mr. Perceval, the president of the Unionist Alliance, had spoken at the annual alliance meeting and "[paid] a tribute to the Nationalists of the country for the way they have responded to the call of the country, and [expressed] a wish to bring about good feeling between all parties, irrespective of religion and politics. That is the end we have all been aiming at."[110] Even the president of the Unionist Alliance encouraged cooperation between unionists and nationalists, and he emphasized the equal sacrifices of Irish soldiers regardless of political sentiments. Such cooperation was more common in the south of Ireland, where unionists had resigned themselves to the passage of the Home Rule bill and thus attempted to cooperate with nationalists to ensure that the promised Irish parliament retained close ties with Great Britain.[111]

Shared experience and the "brotherhood of the battlefield" may explain why, despite the contentious atmosphere within Ireland, Irish soldiers—including Lucy—described only minimal conflict between Irish soldiers within the ranks after the outbreak of war. Certainly, regional differences were still commented on, but these remarks were often casual or even joking in tone. There are multiple possible reasons for this reduction of tensions. As the *Derry Journal* reporter above suggested, the men may have formed stronger bonds of camaraderie based on regimental

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[109] "Cooks and Creeds, Belfast Again Distinguishes Itself," *Derry Journal*, April 28, 1915, accessed February 5, 2023.

[110] J.F. Cunningham, "London Notes," *Sligo Champion*, February 27, 1915, accessed March 1, 2023.

[111] Hennessey, *Dividing Ireland*, 187.

pride, or they may have bonded over shared experience of battle and common wartime goals. Their removal from broader societal tension within Ireland may have also played a role; when the men were in France or Flanders or even England, they were less exposed to the Irish political and religious tensions and the divisions which resulted.

After the outbreak of war, Lucy again recorded observations on the "Orangemen" in his unit but suggested that, while soldiers were conscious of and commented on differences, the shared aim and shared experiences of the men caused them to generally overlook these divisions.[112] He reported that "two of my best chums were Belfast Orangemen, and we all shared and suffered together, and made merry too."[113] Although these men were apparently members of the Orange Order—an Ulster-based Protestant unionist organization—their shared experiences were more important than their differences. While coping with the hardship of war and the death of his younger brother in action in September 1914, Lucy explained, he and his fellow soldiers "had nothing tangible to hold on to except each other."[114] Camaraderie among the soldiers overcame even the prewar tension and division between southern Irish Catholics and northern Protestants. He later described an equally enthusiastic welcome given by "Orangemen as well as nationalists" when John Redmond inspected the unit, and he stated explicitly that "we buried the hatchet of bigotry during the war."[115]

Captain Noel Drury of the 6th Royal Dublin Fusiliers did not directly comment on religious or political divisions within his unit, but entries in his diary illustrate the camaraderie between Irish soldiers despite religious differences. Drury himself was Protestant but repeatedly

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[112] Lucy, *There's a Devil in the Drum,* 294.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid., 345.

expressed pride in his Irish background. Upon arriving at Salonika in October 1915, he reported that a passing French battleship "turned out their band and played 'Tipperary.' I suppose they think that is our National Anthem - anyway it was very decent of them, and they played it very well and with great spirit."[116] He also remarked many times on his friendship with and admiration for Richard "Stuffer" Byrne, the unit's quartermaster and a Catholic. On one occasion in December 1915, Drury described Byrne's organizational and leadership ability in directing battalions and supplies for transport despite the stress and confusion of a hasty retreat under Bulgarian artillery. He concluded that "that man ought to get the D.S.O. [Distinguished Service Order]. He rises to the occasion, and no job is too big for him to run when the need arises."[117]

Irish Catholic chaplain Francis Gleeson, serving the 2nd Royal Munster Fusiliers in France, described similar camaraderie and Irish pride among the soldiers despite their religious and political differences. Gleeson said Mass for the Catholic soldiers on Saint Patrick's Day in 1915—"our biggest day from our national and religious view point"—and wrote in his journal that "one of the most beautiful things was the presence of an Officer who, til he joined us, was a Carson volunteer in Ireland. He was today as Irish and as 'proud of it to' [sic] as any of us."[118] As mentioned in chapter one, in early 1914 Edward Carson had raised a volunteer force in Ulster to oppose to implementation of Home Rule, by force if necessary. The symbolic significance of

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[116] Diary of Captain Noel Drury, 6th Battalion The Royal Dublin Fusiliers, October 1915 to July 1916, 10 October 1915, NAM 1976-07-69-2, National Army Museum, London.

[117] Diary of Captain Noel Drury, 6th Battalion The Royal Dublin Fusiliers, October 1915 to July 1916, 8 December 1915.

[118] Diary of Fr. Francis A. Gleeson 7 February 1915 - 3 May 1915, 17 March 1915, transcript, Fr. Francis A. Gleeson Papers, University College Dublin Digital Library, http://digital.ucd.ie/get/ucdlib:37310/content.

the feast of St. Patrick was apparently strong enough to attract even one of these volunteers. Gleeson's description also implies that those in Ulster were not considered truly Irish; however, this distinction was not insurmountable, and the volunteer was united with his Catholic comrades by shared Irish pride.

In the south of Ireland, political and recruitment speeches continued to emphasize Irish solidarity in fighting Germany, and the speakers often ascribed nationalist goals to these soldiers. In January 1916, the mayor of Drogheda gave a speech for New Year's Day and boasted that "when the War broke out, the Churches—both Catholic and Protestant, the Press, Nationalist and Unionist, and public men of all shades of political thought, joined together in one mighty effort to smash German militarism." He added that he "[hoped] when hostilities are ended that the elements joined together at present…would join together to make this [Irish] nation."[119] Similar sentiments were expressed at a recruitment meeting in County Kerry that same month, where nationalist speaker D.J. Reidy noted that the war effort had brought together "Unionists and Catholic, Protestant and Nationalist, working for a common country. That was a platform from which they could take the signs for the future of the Irish Nation. (Cheers)." Describing an idealized future, Reidy added that "when the clouds and storms of this war had passed away Irelan's [sic] day would have come when a Parliament would be opened by John Redmond preceded by the King. (Loud cheers)."[120] This narrative was symbolic of hopes for enduring Irish unity after the war. The suggestion of an Irish parliament opened by John Redmond appealed to the hopes of nationalists and Home Rule supporters, but the speaker also allayed the

[119] "New Year's Day in Drogheda," *Drogheda Independent*, January 8, 1916, accessed March 1, 2023.

[120] "Mr. D. J. Reidy Replies to Newspaper Attack. Important Proceedings," *Kerry Press*, January 11, 1916, accessed March 1, 2023.

fears of unionists by emphasizing that this Irish parliament would be in accord with the king of Great Britain.

While political and religious division certainly persisted in Ireland and within the ranks of the British army, the shared war effort and sacrifice of Irish soldiers seems to have taken precedence over prior tensions, at least in the south of Ireland. Instead, it was replaced by general pride for the accomplishments and contributions of Irish soldiers—both "unionist and Catholic, Protestant and Nationalist."

National Distinctions 1914-1916

Despite the assurances of moderate nationalists that Home Rule would not entail a complete rejection of Great Britain, a division already existed between Britain and Ireland. This division was not driven solely by Irish nationalists but rather seems to have been motivated by mutual mistrust, with both English and the Irish regarding each other as alien. Just as Irish literature and rhetoric had presented Irish-English relations as a constant struggle of the Celtic race against Saxon, "the idea that the Celtic race was in some manner inferior to the Saxon was common in English literature during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."[121]

Derogatory sentiments were often made toward the "Celtic race" overall; however, English perceptions of racial inferiority were primarily directed toward the Irish, not the Scottish or Welsh, although exceptions were present. The London *Evening* Standard, for example, used this language to criticize a speech from David Lloyd George, which allegedly suffered due to Lloyd George's self-proclaimed Celtic nature as a Welshman. The reporter stated that, where the

[121] Gerard Oram, *Worthless Men: Race, eugenics and the death penalty in the British Army during the First World War* (London: Francis Boutle Publishers, 1998), 64.

"Saxon" politician was reasoned and rational, the Celt "is inflamed by the influences of the moment. … There is no opportunity for facts to push in their diminished heads."[122]

Regarding Ireland specifically, racist perceptions were frequently influenced by anti-Catholic sentiment, as Catholicism "was cast as foreign and incompatible with English-ness."[123] As shown in chapter one, Irish Catholics were viewed as inherently violent, in contrast with Irish Protestants who, though part of the "British race," might still be corrupted by association if the Catholic majority was granted Home Rule.[124] A column in the *Essex County Chronicle* similarly described negative Celtic traits, although this writer attributed the negative aspects to alleged racial mixing within Ireland centuries prior; among the racial "strains" were "Oriental," "Latin," and "Moorish." Additionally, "the Irish peasant has all the indolent disinclination to bestir himself, the dislike of hard work which has always been characteristic of the peoples of Southern Europe and Northern Africa." As an example of apparent Irish irrationality, the writer explained that the Irish preferred to purchase goods from Catholic merchants even at a higher price; ironically, he added that "this may seem an extraordinary fact to English people, for over here we have none of these religious prejudices."[125]

Each example provided above was from the eve of war in early or mid-1914, and these beliefs of Anglo-Saxon superiority influenced British attitudes toward the Irish throughout the First World War. In contrast with prewar racism, which was directed toward Catholics rather

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[122] "Celtic Human Nature," *Evening Standard* (London), March 11, 1914, accessed March 10, 2023.

[123] Oram, *Worthless Men*, 64.

[124] "Irish Home Rule," *Strathearn Herald,* February 14, 1914, accessed March 10, 2023.

[125] "The Irish Question," *Essex County Chronicle*, June 12, 1914, accessed March 10, 2023.

than Protestants, during the war little distinction was made between Catholic or Protestant Irish soldiers.

Lieutenant Colonel George Brenton Laurie, a Canadian and Protestant commander of the Royal Irish Rifles wrote in March 1915 that "these Irishmen are most amusing fellows; they can't be treated like the English soldier: one has to be much more strict with them, and ride them at other times with a much lighter hand."[126] Laurie's attitude paralleled English racialized descriptions of the Irish as prone to violence and disobedience. Although Laurie did not explain what this "strict" discipline might entail, other officers and military courts took a harsh stance against the alleged unruliness of Irish soldiers. A 2004 report by the Irish government found disproportionate courts martial of Irish soldiers within the British forces during World War I. The then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Dermot Ahern noted that Irish soldiers comprised eight percent of British courts martial, despite comprising only two percent of the army. Twenty-six of these men were posthumously pardoned by the British government in 2012.[127] Significantly, the rate of punishment was comparable between Irish Catholic and Protestant divisions, with even the intensely loyalist 36th (Ulster) Division suffering proportional executions to other Irish units.[128] As a result, the disproportionate executions of Irish soldiers cannot be considered a result of anti-Catholic or anti-nationalist sentiment. Rather, it seems to have been general anti-

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[126] George Brenton Laurie to Florence Clementina Vere-Laurie, March 8, 1915, in *Heavy Fighting Before Us: The Letters of an Officer of the Royal Irish Rifles on the Western Front During the Great War,* ed. Florence Vere-Laurie (Leonaur Ltd., 2008), 143.

[127] "Clear record as executed Irish soldiers exonerated," *Independent.ie,* May 13, 2014, https://www.independent.ie/life/world-war-1/clear-record-as-executed-irish-soldiers-exonerated-30270603.html (accessed February 10, 2023).

[128] Oram, *Worthless Men*, 72.

Irish sentiment, or a broad belief that the Irish were particularly violent or uncontrollable and thus needed to be dealt with firmly to deter any potential disobedience.

Irish civilians and soldiers alike accused British military officials of intentionally overlooking or ignoring the feats of Irish soldiers. In September 1915 the *Derry Journal* reported that the Dublin Fusiliers and Munster Fusiliers had been neglected in despatches from the Dardanelles despite having "formed the very spearhead of the landing." This, the reporter stated, "has rightly evoked protests in all parts of Ireland, while several letter-writers in the London Press have freely expressed their amazement and indignation."[129] Noel Drury, himself an officer of the Dublin Fusiliers who had participated in the Gallipoli landing, repeated similar complaints nearly one year later. He theorized in his diary that, taking into account the conspicuous lack of acknowledgement for their actions at both Gallipoli and Serbia, there was a pattern of intentional bias against his division.[130]

It is clear that Irish Protestants and unionists were not exempt from anti-Irish sentiments within the British ranks, and it is possible that the shared experience—or at least perceptions—of English discrimination actually strengthened the bond between Irish soldiers of differing politics or religion. Rather than focusing on differences between themselves, they unified against a common adversary. Just as the threat of German aggression unified nationalist and unionist Irish men, derogatory depictions and sentiments by English comrades and officers provided a common 'enemy' for Irish soldiers to define themselves against.

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[129] "The Beclouding of Irish Valour," *Derry Journal*, September 6, 1915, accessed March 1, 2023.

[130] Diary of Captain Noel Drury, 6th Battalion The Royal Dublin Fusiliers, October 1915 to July 1916, 24 June 1916.

Corporal John Lucy described a strong internal tension between his identity as an Irishman and as a British soldier, implying a dichotomy between the two: "My mind was slightly troubled, because I would have preferred to have pledged my body to the cause of Ireland, still in thraldom. It was her's [sic] by every right and every tradition, yet I felt bound in honour to England too, for I had attested on oath, and I was a British soldier as well as being an Irishman and a Catholic."[131] Lucy suggested that being a British soldier was inherently incompatible with being "an Irishman and a Catholic." Like Patrick Hone, Lucy seemed to feel a "big gulf" between the Irish and the English, which was not easily reconciled.

2nd Lieutenant Thomas Fitzgerald Martin of the Royal Field Artillery, a Catholic from Dublin, wrote home in May 1916 and expressed his hope that Great Britain would "bring in conscription for Ireland as well as the rest. Why should we be left out considering an Irishman has got the name of being the finest fighter in the world."[132] He seemed to reference the myth of the Irish soldier, together with perceptions that the Irish were naturally inclined to fighting; in this instance, however, the assertion was not derogatory but rather a source of pride. He repeated similar sentiments in April 1917, lamenting that so many eligible men remained in Ireland: "They are the very men wanted out here. Anybody will tell you 'the men for a push are Irish, Scotch or Canadians'."[133]

Martin's support for conscription was unusual among his countrymen. Ireland was exempt from conscription when it was implemented in the United Kingdom in January 1916,

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[131] Lucy, *There's a Devil in the Drum,* 319.

[132] Correspondence from Thomas Fitzgerald Martin to family, May 12, 1916, MS 11503/2, Beatty and Martin World War I material, Manuscripts & Archives Research Library, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland.

[133] Correspondence from Thomas Fitzgerald Martin to family, April 20, 1917, Beatty and Martin World War I material.

largely due to intense opposition within Ireland.[134] Even those who supported the war and Irish soldiers frequently opposed Irish conscription for fear of unequal implementation. A common argument in Ireland against the implementation of conscription was that Irish soldiers would be sacrificed to save the English. Catholic chaplain Martin Branigan wrote to John Redmond in November 1915 that he had "a strong suspicion that when 'Compulsion' is decreed, underhand [sic] efforts will contrive to extort every available man from Ireland while sparing many, under pretext of other national service, in England."[135]

Captain Drury, too, frequently described fellow soldiers as either Irish or English rather than as Catholic nationalist or Protestant unionist, and he seemed to hold the English soldiers in disdain. Drury tended to look down on English regiments in the division, and he took particular offense to English soldiers of the Norfolk Regiment, who apparently expressed displeasure at being attached to an Irish unit. In his diary entry for 19 October 1915, he wrote, "I have overheard a few remarks about their 'hard luck' in being attached to an Irish Regiment. By the Lord, I'll make them have sense. It isn't everyone has the honour to be in the oldest Regiment in the army, making Empire history ever since 1641." He added that he had "a little booklet which I must read them extracts from on parade, and make them learn our Battle Hononours [sic]."[136] As a commissioned officer Drury insisted that the English men learn the history and victories of the Dublin Fusiliers and the unit's contribution to the British empire. Drury continued to express contempt and bitterness toward the English soldiers, especially those of the Norfolk Regiment

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[134] Niamh Gallagher, *Ireland and the Great War: A Social and Political History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 29.

[135] Correspondence from Rev. Martin Branigan to John Redmond, November 15, 1915, MS 15,261/9/11(2), John Redmond Papers, National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[136] Diary of Captain Noel Drury, 6th Battalion The Royal Dublin Fusiliers, October 1915 to July 1916, 19 October 1915.

and their officers, whom he later dismissed as "'foreigners'" and "rotters."[137] The label of "foreigner" to describe English troops is particularly telling, as it implies a strict—and somewhat derogatory—ethnic distinction and resembled Drury's unimpressed descriptions of Greeks, Bulgarians, Turks, and French soldiers that he encountered during his service.

Effect of the 1916 Rising

On 24 April 1916, the day after Easter, about 1200 radical Irish nationalists seized key locations in Dublin—most prominently, the General Post Office—and declared the establishment of an Irish republic. They had hoped to capitalize on Britain's distraction during the war or at least to "[revive] nationalist militancy through a bold gesture."[138] Smaller actions were taken in counties across Ireland. They were quickly opposed by British forces, including Irish regiments, and the fighting and especially British artillery resulted in the destruction of many buildings in Dublin. In Dublin alone "64 insurgents were killed, along with 132 crown forces and about 230 civilians."[139] The British reacted to the possibility of further uprising by declaring martial law in Ireland and interning Irish civilians on suspicion of sympathy for the rebels.

Executions of fifteen of the Rising's leaders were carried out in secret and without trials throughout the month of May 1916, but news of their fate was slower to reach soldiers on the continent and especially in the Balkans, where soldiers such as Captain Drury were stationed. This delay resulted in two distinct phases of reaction by Irish soldiers; the first was prompted by news of the rebellion itself, with a second response to the news of the executions and martial law

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[137] Diary of Captain Noel Drury, 6th Battalion The Royal Dublin Fusiliers, October 1915 to July 1916, week ending 24 June 1916.

[138] "Rising of 1916," *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, ed. S. J. Connolly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 488.

[139] Ibid.

in Ireland. The news of the rebellion initially increased Irish solidarity within the British army, and Noel Drury described anger and shame among the Irish soldiers at the first news of the rebellion:

> Its [sic] a regular stab in the back for our fellows out here … I don't know how we will be able to hold our heads up here as we are sure to be looked upon with suspicion. The men are mad about it all, but dont [sic] understand who is mixed up in the affair. I am sure Germany is at the bottom of this somehow.[140]

The next week, he recorded reports of "heavy fighting near Loos, most of it being done by Irish troops who used the bayonet with effect. 'The gallantry of the Irish troops is an answer to the German plots and attempts to rouse sedition in Ireland.'"[141] He seems to have been quoting the news telegram, and its inclusion in his diary shows that an initial response among Irish soldiers was to strive yet harder to prove themselves, to distance themselves from the rebels in Dublin. Irish soldiers seem to have felt a need to make up for their countrymen's rebellion, to prove the loyalty and bravery of Irish men and Irish soldiers. Still, he continued to identify himself with his fellow Irishmen and attempted to dismiss the rebellion as a German plot, not the actions of true Irishmen.

Although the Rising itself was not a German plot, other reports confirm German attempts to demoralize Irish soldiers with news of the rebellion. M.P. John Redmond's brother William, serving as a captain in the Royal Irish Regiment on the Western Front, reported that German soldiers opposite the Irish trench created a sign declaring: "'English guns firing on your wives and children! … Throw your arms away – we give you a hearty welcome.'" These efforts were

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[140] Diary of Captain Noel Drury, 6th Battalion The Royal Dublin Fusiliers, October 1915 to July 1916, 29 April 1916.

[141] Diary of Captain Noel Drury, 6th Battalion The Royal Dublin Fusiliers, October 1915 to July 1916, week ending 6 May 1916.

rebuffed, and William Redmond added that "we retaliated by playing Irish Airs and RULE BRITTANIA [sic] on a melodeon."[142] Not only did the Irish soldiers play their own songs, but they also reaffirmed their alliance with Britain by playing Rule Britannia in response to the German message.

2nd Lieutenant Thomas Fitzgerald Martin, a Catholic, echoed Drury's sentiments in a letter home on 3 May 1916. He wrote that he wished to "come over with the battery and wipe out every Sinn Feiner that ever lived. Now's the time to bring in conscription and draught [sic] them all out here with different regiments. … I dont [sic] believe there is a single Irish soldier who would think twice about shooting them."[143] Nonetheless, like Drury, Martin rejected "Sinn Feiners" and suggested a gulf between them and true Irish soldiers.[144] Whereas Martin had previously advocated conscription as a way to prove Irish fighting ability, he now suggested it as a punishment which would allow enlisted Irish soldiers to mete out justice themselves. Whether or not he intended this as a serious proposal is unclear, but the suggestion alone illustrates the intensity of anger and resentment toward the rebels.

By the end of the May, however, news had arrived of the ongoing executions of the Rising leaders, triggering yet another shift in Irish opinion. Irish members of parliament protested the executions and warned that the harsh response would undo any Irish Catholic support for the war effort. At a sitting of the House of Commons on 11 May, Irish Parliamentary

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[142] Note from Capt. William Redmond to John Redmond, May 5, 1916, MS 15,262/5/3, John Redmond Papers, National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[143] Correspondence from Thomas Fitzgerald Martin to family, May 3, 1916, Beatty and Martin World War I material.

[144] The radical nationalist Sinn Féin party was largely uninvolved in the Rising, although newspaper reports often blamed it for the rebellion due to its vocal anti-English sentiments and opposition to Irish participation in the war. See "Sinn Féin," *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, ed. S. J. Connolly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 514.

Party (IPP) M.P. John Dillon begged for an end to reprisals and martial law, warning that "you are letting loose a river of blood…between two races who, after three hundred years of hatred and of strife, we had nearly succeeded in bringing together." He blamed British administrative failure for declining enlistment within Ireland and predicted that the secrecy surrounding the executions would lead to further resentment among the population: "what is poisoning the mind of Ireland, and rapidly poisoning it, is the secrecy of these trials and the continuance of these executions."[145]

Whereas Dillon cautioned that the reprisals undermined the 'racial' unity brought about by the shared war effort, IPP M.P. Laurence Ginnell expressed a harsher view and in fact referenced the Allied cause to accuse Britain of hypocrisy. He claimed to be "addressing…an assembly stained with the blood of some of my dearest friends for no crime but that of attempting to do for Ireland what you urge the Belgians to do for Belgium."[146] Whereas Dillon largely distanced the Irish populace from the actions of the rebels but warned about the impact of the executions on Irish support for the war, Ginnell suggested that the cause of the rebels was comparable to that of the Allies in Belgium. He then accused the British members of parliament of racial extermination:

> If there were not a man of military age in Ireland [the Prime Minister] would be still more satisfied, and so would you, Mr. Speaker, and so would the majority of Members in this House. … You want to sacrifice all the manhood, not of England, but of the outlying

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[145] *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, May 11, 1916 (John Dillon, M.P. Irish Parliamentary Party), https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1916/may/11/continuance-of-martial-law.

[146] *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, May 11, 1916 (Laurence Ginnell, M.P. Irish Parliamentary Party), https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1916/may/11/continuance-of-martial-law.

> countries—of Scotland, of Wales, of Ireland, and of your unfortunate Dependencies and Colonies. You want to wipe out the Celtic race.[147]

Both Dillon and Ginnell drew on the existing rhetoric of division between Celtic and Saxon races and framed the rebellion and executions within the context of the Great War. Dillon's remarks about racial division were reprinted with edits in English newspapers, while Ginnell's were not and were described only as "a violent speech."[148]

Although the exact remarks were not published, news of the executions and martial law in Ireland prompted outrage and renewed religious and political hostility among Irish soldiers. Whereas the Rising had initially prompted solidarity and unity among Irish soldiers, who tended to denounce the rebellion, many of the same soldiers described arguments and increased conflict in the wake of the reprisals. As Dillon had warned in the House of Commons, the secrecy of the executions allowed the spread of rumors regarding the state of Dublin and of Ireland as a whole.

In his memoir, John Lucy dedicated little space to his recollections of the event; he had been in a convalescent home recovering from a long illness when the rebellion occurred. However, he wrote that his "fellow soldiers had no great sympathy with the rebels, but they got fed up when they heard of the executions of the leaders. I experienced a cold fury, because I would see the whole British Empire damned sooner than hear of an Irishman being killed in his own country by any intruding stranger."[149] Lucy's recollection illustrates the rapid shift in opinion among the Irish soldiers, and his response is a clear departure from his earlier

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[147] *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, May 11, 1916 (Laurence Ginnell, M.P. Irish Parliamentary Party).

[148] See "Premier Leaves for Ireland," *Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette,* May 12, 1916, accessed March 10, 2023.

[149] Lucy, *There's a Devil in the Drum,* 352.

discussions of camaraderie and justification for his own participation in the imperial forces. Instead, his dismissal of the British as "intruding strangers" echoes Noel Drury's earlier descriptions of English soldiers as "foreigners."

Noel Drury, in contrast, continued to sympathize with the British response—a position which placed him at odds with his Catholic friends. Until this point in his diary, Noel Drury had rarely referred to his own religion or that of his comrades. Now, however, he described the loud and public argument that it caused between himself and Quartermaster Byrne:

> I had a furious argument with Byrne in Mess about the cause of disaffection in Ireland. He takes the view of most of his type that the governments [sic] past and present treatment of Ireland is wrong, and denies that the attitude of the Irish has been naturally antagonistic to England, mainly owing to want of education and the religion of the country teaching the people not to think for themselves.[150]

Drury, who had previously expressed strong pride in his Irish identity, now distanced himself from his countrymen and accused the Irish of being "naturally antagonistic to England," a tendency which he blamed on the Catholic Church. He had not previously mentioned religious division at all in his diary, but the opposing perceptions of the Rising and executions caused latent religious tension to flare up. Whereas Drury had previously described close friendship and camaraderie with the battalion's quartermaster, he now dismissed Byrne's perspective as one typical of "his type," apparently referring to Irish Catholics.

Despite the contentious atmosphere, some newspapers continued to describe the war as a unifying force for Ireland. On 27 May 1916, *Drogheda Independent* printed a column originally published in the London *Daily News* by James Douglas, a self-described "Ulster Protestant

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[150] Diary of Captain Noel Drury, 6th Battalion The Royal Dublin Fusiliers, October 1915 to July 1916, week ending 20 May 1916.

Home Ruler." He proudly reported that "the new loyalty of the new Ireland superbly stood the strain [of the Rising and war]. The Irish regiments at the front went on fighting. The Irish people as a whole refused to stir in aid of the Dublin faction."[151] Given that the column was initially published in a London newspaper, Douglas was presumably writing for an English readership. It is likely that he emphasized the initial Irish rejection of the rebellion in an attempt to convince his readers that Ireland remained loyal and could still be trusted with Home Rule.

Even after the 1916 Easter Rising and the executions of its leaders, tensions only temporarily increased and were largely suppressed within the ranks. Irish soldiers and moderate nationalist leaders continued to publicly promote cooperation. For example, barely two months after the Rising, a letter from Catholic chaplain Francis Gleeson was published in the *Drogheda Independent* which expressed almost identical sentiments as those of recruitment speeches in the first years of the war. Although Gleeson emphasized the specifically Catholic piety of the Munster soldiers he ministered to, he concluded:

> From Dunkirk to Bagdad the soldier sons of Southern Ireland have mixed their sweat and blood with that of their Protestant brothers of Northern Ireland; and, having met the Ulstermen and Munstermen on the crimsoned fields of France, and having myself laid their mangled bodies side by side in the same grave, I am justified in believing that, at last, the unity and fraternal friendship of all Irishmen is the harvest from the seeds of brotherhood and common nationality sown in the great sacrifices of a great War.[152]

It is possible that Gleeson's position as a chaplain made him overly optimistic about unity and brotherhood among the soldiers, given that it was sufficient for him that "all Irishmen are

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[151] James Douglas, "London Press Opinions. Let England Remember---Let Ireland Forget," *Drogheda Independent*, May 27, 1916, accessed March 2, 2023.

[152] "The Munster Fusiliers. Letter from a Former Regimental Chaplain," *Drogheda Independent*, July 1, 1916, accessed March 1, 2023.

followers of Christ" despite their differing denominations.[153] However, it is notable that this letter was published in a southern Irish newspaper even after the recent upheaval and executions of the Rising. Its publication shows that the Catholic Irish did not immediately reject their soldiers, the war, or even their Protestant or unionist countrymen; rather, those who attempted to reconcile tensions within Ireland drew on earlier rhetoric which emphasized the common war effort and shared sacrifice of Irish soldiers.

Similar sentiments were expressed even by civilians within Ireland. A meeting of the moderate nationalist United Irish League in Donegal in November 1916 denounced both the Rising itself and the harsh British executions and reprisals. The League remained aligned with John Redmond and the promise of Home Rule; though they acknowledged that "there had been a panic in Irish politics" in the form of the Rising, they remained convinced that "things were steadying themselves…and when the fitful fever of factionism [sic] had spent itself the sane, sensible nationalism emerged triumphant."[154] One delegate continued to emphasize Irish brotherhood and noted that their party still "wanted Home Rule for the Orangemen, too—they wanted the grit, business capacity, and industrial spirit of the North, in their Irish Parliament, just as they wanted the bright wit and sparkling genius of the Celt in the South. (Hear, hear)." Like the prewar rhetoric against the "Celtic race," this language seems to suggest that those in Ulster were not the same as the "Celts" in the south of Ireland; however, the speakers later argued that this distinction ultimately made little difference because those in Ulster and in the south were united by love of Ireland.

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[153] Ibid.

[154] "United Irish League," *Derry Journal*, November 10, 1916, accessed March 1, 2023.

Optimistic newspaper reports of continued friendship among Irish soldiers despite political and religious differences were not entirely fabricated for the sake of securing Home Rule and proving Irish loyalty. 2nd Lieutenant Alan Young McPeake, a Dublin Catholic attending school in England, enlisted in the Connaught Rangers in 1917 and arrived in France in 1918. Years later, in a letter to an unnamed recipient he recalled his friendship with a Protestant comrade, Harry. McPeake described an occasion during his training or service abroad when three girls on their way to church passed the two soldiers: "in mock horror I asked 'Not a Prodsin [sic] church?' Harry explained he was a 'lone English Protestant in a camp full of terrible Irish Papists.'"[155] McPeake's jovial attitude toward the soldiers' religious differences may have resulted from his education in England prior to enlistment; however, it still suggests that the initial tensions had receded enough to allow joking references to religious differences within the Irish unit.

That being said, tensions in the ranks seem to have been suppressed rather than truly forgotten. After receiving a commission in May 1917, John Lucy reported that there was an "unwritten code" observed in the officers' mess in which "the subjects of religion, politics, and women were taboo."[156] It seems that in order to maintain order and respect among officers, the discussion of religion and politics was avoided by unspoken agreement. Significantly, Lucy had rejected an offer to transfer to the Munster Fusiliers—which recruited in southern Ireland, including his native Cork—in favor of remaining with the Royal Irish Rifles. He stated that he "did not want to break old association with the Ulster men, who were my friends and whose

[155] Correspondence from Alan Young McPeake to unnamed recipient, NAM 1992-04-153-8, National Army Museum, London.

[156] Lucy, *There's a Devil in the Drum,* 354.

ways I knew."[157] Despite the renewed hostility described by multiple Irish soldiers in the aftermath of the Rising, the regional and even religious divide did not return to prewar intensity. In this instance the bond of the battlefield prevailed.

Although religious differences could be overcome by shared war experience, Lucy's memoir suggests that Irish soldiers harshly rejected any fellow soldiers who had participated in suppressing the Rising. For example, Lucy's regiment included an English sergeant who had been a member of the firing squad in Dublin and participated in the executions of the Rising's leaders. Lucy claimed that his own anger prevented him from recalling much of his conversation with the man, but explained: "knowing my sympathies by hearsay, he [the English sergeant] had come to me somehow like a man coming back to the scene of some doubtful act to attempt reconciliation. He was the first of a number of unhappy Englishmen who tried, and tried vainly, to square their acts against Ireland with me."[158]

This cannot be dismissed merely as another example of the increased division between English and Irish soldiers, however. Irish soldiers had been called upon to suppress the Rising as well, and they received a far worse reception by nationalist Irish soldiers within the ranks. One newly arrived officer expressed concerns that even if he was not killed in action by the Germans, "some southern Irishman might shoot him down surreptitiously in battle for the part he had played in Dublin."[159] Lucy reported that the man was killed in action in his first engagement, though it was uncertain whether he had been killed by the Germans or whether his comrades had indeed killed him themselves. Lucy's own attitude toward the matter was "rather

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[157] Ibid., 353.
[158] Ibid., 356.
[159] Ibid., 360.

indifferent…because he [the officer] was an Irishman and should have not fought against his own people."[160] Unlike the English sergeant above, this Irish officer does not seem to have participated in executions but had simply fought against the rebels in Dublin. However, he was treated more harshly by his comrades because he himself was Irish; although all of the men involved in the above incident were themselves members of the British forces and had also sworn their allegiance to the King, they seem to have prioritized their identity as Irishmen over their duties as British soldiers.

The implication that this officer was quietly executed by his comrades for his role in the Rising illustrates the impact of the British reprisals in turning Irish opinion against England—even among enlisted soldiers. Whether or not the man truly was killed by his Irish comrades is, in a way, irrelevant; Lucy's description and his own dismissive attitude toward the possibility are sufficient to prove their resentment toward the man. Lucy's account is reminiscent of Thomas Fitzgerald Martin's letter in the immediate aftermath of the rebellion. In May 1916 Martin had perhaps hyperbolically declared that Irish soldiers would gladly shoot any 'Sinn Feiners' if they were given the chance. By the summer of 1917, this fate was a serious possibility—not for the rebels themselves, but rather for Irish soldiers who may have fought *against* their rebellious countrymen in Dublin.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the records of only a few of the Irish soldiers, both Catholic and Protestant, who enlisted in the British army during the Great War. Nevertheless, their letters and diaries provide insight into their perceptions of each other and of their English comrades. An

[160] Ibid., 361.

examination of these sources, together with Irish and English newspapers, has shown that over the course of the war distinctions between the Irish and English tended to replace inter-Irish religious and political tensions within the ranks. Shared Irish sacrifice united (southern) Irish sentiment in support of the war and their soldiers while at the same time highlighting their differences with England. These differences were often expressed in racialized terms, drawing on nineteenth-century descriptions of Irish history as perpetual conflict between English Saxons and Irish Celts.

I do not propose that this chapter is a definitive or comprehensive discussion of the attitudes of all Irish soldiers, nor do I suggest that the trends that I have identified apply to all Irish soldiers or that all soldiers shared the same experiences. However, the attitudes of the soldiers studied in this chapter indicate that there is another aspect of Irish nationalism and Irish perception of the English, which has not yet been studied in depth. Although religious and political affiliation frequently coincided, the words of Irish soldiers themselves in letters or diaries show that the situation was more complex than a strict dichotomy of Catholic nationalists and Protestant unionists.

While religion and political affiliation were certainly important to Irish soldiers during the First World War, their accounts show that the most significant and commonly remarked-upon difference between soldiers was that of nationality. In this chapter I argued that, while Irish soldiers acknowledged religious or political differences among themselves, their letters and diaries suggest that the most significant distinction was between themselves and English soldiers. Irish soldiers, whether Catholic or Protestant, described differences between Irish and English soldiers far more than they described differences between Irish soldiers of differing denominations. This resulted from a shared Irish patriotism and pride in their Irish identity,

regardless of religion or politics. After the Easter Rising in April 1916 there was little lasting, *conspicuous* change within the ranks; religious and political tensions flared between Irish soldiers in the immediate aftermath, but moderate nationalist newspapers in Ireland and even the soldiers themselves continued to emphasize the equal contributions of Protestant and Catholic Irish soldiers. Such reports of cooperation and unity in the trenches were largely true, but they hid or were ignorant of the persistent tensions within the army—no longer along religious, political, or even national lines, but now more subtly toward any soldier perceived as having betrayed Ireland and their countrymen.

CONCLUSION

The armistice in November 1918 may have brought about a ceasefire for the international conflict, but in Ireland, as in many other small nations in the aftermath of the Great War, tension was increasing and would soon erupt into revolution. The Sinn Féin party won a majority of seats in the December 1918 general election, displacing the Irish Parliamentary Party as the dominant nationalist political party in Ireland.[161] The Sinn Féin members refused to take their seats at Westminster; instead, they met in Dublin on 21 January 1919 and passed a resolution declaring Irish independence and declaring war against England.[162] On the same day, ten members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in County Tipperary ambushed two members of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC). Both were Catholics and native Irishmen, and both were killed in the attack.[163] Although the ambush had not been sanctioned by Sinn Féin politicians, the timing of the attack with the declaration of Irish independence meant that the ambush was taken to be the first engagement of war.

In the first chapter, I used the Battle of Fontenoy as a lens through which to study 'the myth of the Irish soldier,' and how its rhetorical usage illustrates shifting attitudes toward being part of Great Britain in the eighteenth through the early twentieth century. According to this myth, across the centuries the Irish soldier embodied the timeless qualities of the ideal soldier: courageous, steadfast, and loyal to the cause he served. The molding and re-molding of this

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[161] Thomas Hennessey, *Dividing Ireland: World War One and Partition* (London: Routledge, 1998), 229-230.

[162] "Irish Declaration of Independence, 21 January 1919," quoted in William Kautt, Appendix B to *The Anglo-Irish War, 1916-1921: A People's War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), 131.

[163] "Men Drive Away in Cart Laden with Gelignite," *Freeman's Journal*, January 22, 1919, accessed April 3, 2023.

myth reflects (nationalist) Ireland's tumultuous relationship with and attitude toward Great Britain. This myth had been refashioned over the centuries in Irish cultural memory so that, by World War I, it could be used to encourage Irish Catholic and nationalist participation in the British war effort. The myth's initial anti-imperial connotations were still present, but they were muted in the face of a common enemy and with the seeming assurance of Home Rule at the end of the war.

In chapter two, I studied how perceptions of Irish soldiers played out within the ranks of the British army during the Great War. A similar sense of a shared Irish "martial spirit" was common among those Irish soldiers serving in the British army during the First World War. Significantly, this shared Irishness and the "brotherhood of the battlefield" could overcome even the intense prewar religious and political divisions within Irish society. Distinctions between Irish and English soldiers took precedence over inter-Irish differences, with only a temporary increase in tensions during and after the Easter Rising in 1916. However, the executions of the Rising leaders and the changing political climate within Ireland impacted Irish soldiers within the ranks as well. Perceived betrayal of one's own community, as with the officer described by John Lucy or possibly even the two RIC members killed only three months after the war's end, replaced national divisions as the dominant transgression.

Even after the war, remnants of the IPP clung to wartime depictions of camaraderie and hopes of Home Rule, and these moderate nationalists continued to glorify the sacrifices of Irish Catholic soldiers during the Great War. As the soldiers began the process of demobilization, some IPP members attempted to preemptively defend them from possible reprisals or accusations

of collaboration with the British government as a result of their military service.[164] They claimed that the soldiers' valor would "vindicate them in history," and that "if there had been political changes, and Government betrayals [in Ireland]…no fault lay at the door of these soldiers. They did what they did for Ireland."[165]

These sentiments recall the 'myth of the Irish soldier' and prove that this myth did not immediately fade after the cessation of the Great War. As I previously discussed, this 'myth of the Irish soldier' had already been worked and reworked over the centuries, in tandem with fluctuations in Ireland's colonial relationship with Great Britain. With a new shift, this time in the form of outright revolution, it may be that moderate nationalists attempted to refashion this myth one more time. Further examination into the fate of this myth after the war would be a possible avenue for further research.

The conclusions of this thesis have prompted additional questions. To what extent did Irish soldiers experience tension within the ranks as a result of regional differences, such as the urban/rural divide? Additionally, this thesis has focused almost exclusively on infantry and some religious chaplains, but was the use of myth and rhetoric, and national tensions between soldiers similar among men serving in other branches of the military, such as the navy or the

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[164] Scholars have debated whether such reprisals truly occurred during the ensuing Irish War of Independence; the most recent works argue that veterans were not disproportionately targeted as victims of revolutionary violence. Emmanuel Destenay argued that if acts of reprisal truly took place against veterans, solely on the basis of their military service, it was the act of resentful individuals rather than an official IRA policy. See Emmanuel Destenay, *Shadows from the Trenches: Veterans of the Great War & the Irish Revolution (1918-1923)* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2021), 101. For statistics of instances of violence and killings of RIC and veterans by county and compared to population, see Tables 8 and 9 in Paul Taylor, *Heroes or Traitors? Experiences of Southern Irish Soldiers Returning from the Great War* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 76-79.

[165] "Irish Soldiers' Valour," *Freeman's Journal,* March 14, 1919, accessed March 1, 2023.

medical corps? How did Irish rhetoric change upon interaction with other British colonial subjects? In particular, did racialized language of Saxons and Celts shift as a result?

This thesis has been additionally limited by source availability; it draws heavily on newspaper articles and soldiers' letters and diaries, but the majority of the soldiers' documents and archival sources come from English collections or southern Irish collections in Dublin. A similar exploration with more focus on soldiers from the west of Ireland or especially Ulster would shed more light on the extent to which wartime camaraderie overcame religious and political tensions among Irish soldiers, given that Ulster experienced more religious and political hostility before and certainly after the Great War.

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