



**NUI MAYNOOTH**

Oileáil na hÉireann Má Nuad

THE IMPACT OF EX BRITISH SOLDIERS ON THE IRISH  
VOLUNTEERS AND FREE STATE ARMY 1913-1924

BY

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## Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to highlight the service of ex-British soldiers in the Irish Army and to examine some of their experiences during the period 1913-1924 with particular emphasis on the Irish Civil War. There was a constant utilisation of ex-British servicemen for their skills and also their intimidation by republicans throughout the period but their involvement may have been one of the factors that helped the IRA to bring the British government to negotiate. This is also true for the Free State Army and its defeat of the IRA during the Civil War.

The Irish Volunteers and IRA was a guerrilla force combating a conventional army in many cases by using British military skills learned from ex-British soldiers. The Free State Army fought the IRA, which it had also evolved from, portraying a conventional military force using many more ex-British soldiers and lessons they had learned from the War of Independence against the British and those learned during the Great War. The ex-British soldiers helped to transform the army from a guerrilla force into a conventional army and it was probably their impact that had the greatest influence on the Irish Free State Army in defeating the republican forces and helped win the Irish Civil War.

The fact that the Free State government and the new establishment were seen as pro-British, seen to be supported by the British with a constitution incorporating a pledge of allegiance to the crown was exasperating to republicans. They saw the National Army as crown apparatus and the recruitment of ex-British servicemen, their former enemies as further evidence of this. The attitudes of republicans towards ex-servicemen in Ireland and especially those in the army during the Irish Civil War and the impact of ex-British soldiers on the evolution of the Irish Volunteers and Free State Army has to a great extent been forgotten in Irish nationalist and military historiography.

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**For  
Sheila Hynes**

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

Bureau of Military History	BMH
Dublin Metropolitan Police	DMP
General Head Quarters	GHQ
Irish Air Corps	IAC
Irish Republican Army	IRA
Irish Volunteers	IV
Military Archives of Ireland	MAI
Mulcahy Papers	MP
National Archives of Ireland	NAI
National Library of Ireland	NLI
Non-Commissioned Officer	NCO
Royal Irish Constabulary	RIC
Trinity College Dublin	TCD
Ulster Volunteer Force	UVF
University College Dublin Archives	UCDA



## **Introduction**

The aim of this thesis is to highlight the service of ex-British soldiers in the Irish Army and to examine some of their experiences during the period 1913-1924 with particular emphasis on the Irish Civil War. It will show that there was a constant utilisation of ex-British servicemen for their skills and also their intimidation by republican rhetoric and policy right through the period. The thesis will show that although ex-servicemen fought the crown forces with the IRA it was probably their impact that had the greatest influence on the Irish Free State Army (henceforth army) in defeating the republican forces and helped win the Irish Civil War.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1913 and 1924 the Irish soldier developed through a volunteer force, established to defend the introduction of Home Rule into Ireland, through a split in the Irish Volunteers in 1914 and through an amalgamation of militant groups to become an army of rebellion in 1916. Later it became a guerrilla force during the Irish War of Independence and a conventional army during the Irish Civil War and post war reorganisation.

All through this volatile evolution the army employed ex-British soldiers the vast majority of whom were Irishmen. Prior to 1916 the Volunteers recognised the need for the experience of these men for training their force. After the split in 1914 the majority of the Volunteers followed Redmond's Parliamentary Party's advice and many joined the British Army to fight in the Great War. They became known as the National Volunteers and fought in many of the major battles of the war. While the smaller group kept the Irish Volunteers mantle and fought in the Easter Rebellion. After the war those soldiers returned to Ireland and some became embroiled in the War of Independence and helped train and organise the Volunteers and later the army during the Civil War. The Free State purposely recruited ex-British servicemen who they saw as having the skills needed to fight the war and mimic a modern conventional force and not just to build up numbers.

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<sup>1</sup> The British government had used ex-servicemen in the form of the notorious 'Black and Tans' and 'Auxies' between 1919-1921 to combat the IRA and pacify the country. See Richard Bennett, *The Black and Tans* (Kent, 2001).

It was realised during the war that people with expertise were shaping the army. Whether because of the training individuals had received previously, or through direct contact and learning from engagements the fledgling force modelled itself to a great extent on the British military system as did the pre-treaty Volunteers and IRA.<sup>2</sup> This aspect of Irish military history has to a great extent been denied or forgotten. Many experienced personnel returned after the war to mistrust and intimidation only for some to take part in the Anglo Irish War and Civil War with great influences on the republican and government side respectively. It is one of the many histories of the period, which has never been fully examined. As a result I hope that this research will add to the level of understanding of ex-British servicemen in the evolution of the Irish Army. I believe their role was unique and important and that this has been forgotten or written out of Irish military historiography and Irish nationalist history.

## Secondary sources

Not until recent years and the arrival of historians of the social makeup of modern organisations, like Peter Hart and his *The IRA and Its Enemies, Violence and Community in Cork 1916-1923* (Oxford, 1998) for example, has historiography taken on board the different social elements of movements like the IRA and Irish Army.

Richard Bennett's, *The Black & Tans* (Kent, 2001) introduces the concept of ex-British servicemen being employed in Ireland during the troubles in the early twentieth century. Although this thesis is based on ex-British soldiers who influenced the Irish Army the book is important for a basic knowledge of the period from which to understand the different factions of violence. Although this book is not as important as that of Harts in the context of social history it is however valuable for the impact of ex-British soldiers employed by the British government.

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<sup>2</sup> Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, *General Richard Mulcahy: portrait of a revolutionary* (Dublin, 1992), p. 182.

Michael Hopkinson's, *The Irish War of Independence* (Dublin, 2002), is an excellent resource for the war in Ireland. Hopkinson discusses the profiles of the Volunteers and IRA membership, making note of the importance of Tom Barry in the movement. As with all the works on this period, Barry is featured as an IRA commander and leader of the Cork flying column and the Kilmichael ambush.

Tom Garvin's, *1922: The Birth of Irish Democracy* (Dublin, 2005) discusses the formation of the Free State and Army and the ex-British serviceman's place within it. He states

'that the Free State Army, unlike the army's of other British Commonwealth countries was not made up of lightly renamed versions of the old British regiments. On the contrary those regiments were proudly disbanded. The new Irish Army was actually a strange hybrid organisation consisting of IRA veterans, British Army veterans and young, inexperienced and apolitical mercenaries from the garrison towns who traditionally would have joined the British Army. In many areas it was organised virtually on IRA or Public Band principals during the emergency period of the Civil War but rapidly showed signs of becoming a non-territorial, barrack based regular force of full time professional soldiers and 'that weeks before the Civil War ended a correspondent in the south reported that the army's conduct was astonishingly good considering they have as yet no tradition of respect for their officers'.<sup>3</sup>

For a sense of Irish military tradition of Irish men serving in the British Army one should consult Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery (eds.), *A Military History of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1997).<sup>4</sup> Chapter 17 titled, *Militarism in Ireland 1900-1922*, by David Fitzpatrick details some of the experiences of ex-British soldiers in the Great War and during the Irish War of Independence and Civil War.

The Irish Army and the Volunteer's activities during the period have been documented through the memoirs of those like Ernie O' Malley, Richard Mulcahy and Florence O' Donoghue and there have been more in depth studies in works such as Peter Hart's, *The IRA and its Enemies* and also *The IRA at War 1916-1923* (New York, 2003) Michael Hopkinson's, *Green Against Green* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Dublin, 2004). They examine the

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<sup>3</sup> Tom Garvin's, *1922: The birth of Irish democracy* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Dublin, 2005), P.122.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery (eds.), *A military history of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1996).

social makeup and structures as well as the tactical approaches towards the army's ultimate goal of independence and a republic in the beginning and a Free State later on. This has been greatly enhanced with the release of the witness statements from the Bureau of Military History 1913-1921 in the Irish Military Archives.

Because there is no prize of witness statements by ex British soldiers like those in the BMH it is therefore difficult to pin down definitive material on their involvement so it is necessary to examine the period itself to understand were exactly their skills and as a result their impact would have been most relevant. The actions of the IRA throughout the country is best covered in David Fitzpatrick's, *Politics and Irish life 1913-1921: Provincial Experience of War and Revolution* (Cork, 1998). Fitzpatrick examines the organisational structures of the IRA during the last years of British rule in Ireland, the involvement of ex-servicemen in the IRA and their victimisation by it.

Jane Leonard's 'Facing the Finger of Scorn', *Veteran's Memories* in Martin Evans & Ken Lunn (eds.) *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1997) is a very important study of experiences of soldiers in Ireland after the Great War. Based on oral testimony it reveals some of their victimisation and hardships. Likewise Leonard's 'Getting Them Atlas', *The IRA and Ex-servicemen* in David Fitzpatrick, *Revolution? Ireland 1917-23*, (Trinity History Workshop, Dublin, 1990) reveals the IRA victimisation towards ex-British servicemen and their families.

Eunan O' Halpin's, *Defending Ireland: The Irish Free State and its Enemies Since 1922* is one of the most important books one can use to understand the Irish state after the treaty and during the Civil War.<sup>5</sup> From this work one can get a better view of the limitations, inadequacies and burdens of the early Irish Army and the ex-British soldiers part in it.

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<sup>5</sup> Eunan O' Halpin, *Defending Ireland: The Irish state and its enemies since 1922* (New York, 1999), pp 1-104.

Hopkinson's, *Green Against Green, The Irish Civil War* details some of the attitudes toward those ex-soldiers by members of the army and mentions that General Mulcahy had been speculated on as being replaced by ex-British Army officer General W.R.E. Murphy. It also discusses the numbers of government troops and the weapons and equipment supplied by the British.<sup>6</sup>

J.P. Duggan's, *A History of the Irish Army* (Dublin, 1991) although outdated and in need of expanding is still important as it is based on archival sources and names of some of those ex-servicemen who influenced the army. It also gives an army breakdown and order of battle.<sup>7</sup> However it does not deliver a definitive picture of ex-servicemen's input.

## Primary sources

Amongst all the historical works of this period there is only a limited reference to ex-British servicemen. These soldiers were important during the Irish War of Independence and especially the Civil War.<sup>8</sup> Their skills as signallers, drivers, mechanics, gunners, engineers and their experiences of combat during WWI was invaluable. So there is obviously a lack of material or interest on the impact of this group on Irish historiography and this research, by highlighting some of their input, will hopefully address this.

Most if not all of the primary source material on this period is located in the National Archives of Ireland, Military Archives of Ireland as well in the repositories of University College Dublin, Trinity College Dublin and also the National Library of Ireland and the British National Archives through their Colonial and Dominions office papers and other military repositories.

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Hopkinson, *Green against green: the Irish Civil War* (Dublin, 1988), pp 221-227.

<sup>7</sup> John P. Duggan, *A history of the Irish Army* (Dublin, 1991), pp 69-113.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 334.

The witness statements of the Bureau of Military History 1913-1921 held in the Military Archives of Ireland are an invaluable primary source for the study of the independence struggle and formation of the Volunteers and IRA. The archives also contain extensive sources for the study of twentieth century Irish military history and as such one would expect to find a wealth of information on ex-British servicemen but this is not so.

The Bureau is important for the study of ex-British soldiers and the attitudes of volunteers and local population towards the British Army and those Irishmen serving in it, especially after the Volunteer split. But for pinning down actual British ex-service men it is very difficult as one has to search through almost every detail from statement to intelligence report to find even the smallest references. But what is to be found is, as a result, most important.

The army census of November 1922 details every member of the organisation but does not indicate previous military employment only immediate profiles.<sup>9</sup> Some attestation forms provide hints to former service with B.A. (British Army) on attestation sheets. But this practice did not last and is not very helpful in gauging an accurate figure.

The National Library of Ireland holds the papers of Piaris Beasley, Florence O' Donaghue, Eoin McNeill, Erskine Childers, Bulmer Hobson and Sean T. O' Kelly. The papers on Childers, an ex-British serviceman, deal with the Howth arms drop, his time as secretary to the Irish delegation during the Anglo Irish Treaty negotiations and his later execution at the hands of the army.<sup>10</sup> For the early period the papers deal with his ideology and beliefs and his early life etc and the experience he brought to his republicanism.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Army census 1922 MAI; Valiulis, p. 274.

<sup>10</sup> Childers is a prime example of an ex-British servicemen and civil servant having an impact on Irish military and political life, trial & execution, Childers papers CP7917, TCD.

<sup>11</sup> Irish War of Independence, Childers papers 7917, TCD.

This repository also holds the papers of Bulmer Hobson.<sup>12</sup> These are an excellent source for the workings of the Volunteers and make it quite clear that he proposed the utilisation of ex-British soldiers and the British training manual in the training of the Irish Volunteers.

The most important set of documents available to the researcher on the War of Independence and Civil War are those of Richard Mulcahy, Frank Aiken, Cathal Brugha, Sean McEoin, Ernie O' Malley and Eamon de Valera held in University College Dublin.<sup>13</sup> In these papers one can find many references to ex-British servicemen and correspondence which details the importance of these men.

The National Archives holds files on the army mutiny and one can tie these in with the files of the Taoiseach's Dept, on the claims of the old I.R.A and there reasons for the mutiny in 1924.<sup>14</sup> The finding's of the cabinet committee, which was formed to examine their claims, was that officers who had records going back to pre truce days were being demobbed, while ex-British officers were being retained in the army.<sup>15</sup>

In chapter one I will examine the period from the establishment of the Irish Volunteers to defend the 'Home Rule' bill through the Volunteer split and the Easter Rising through the War of Independence and up to the treaty. It will show that the Volunteers followed the Ulster Volunteer Force in militarising their movement by employing ex-British servicemen to train their people. It will detail how the Volunteer movement in the Southern Ireland recruited ex-servicemen to enhance their capabilities. It will highlight the requirement for the skills of ex-British servicemen and there role in the Irish War of Independence.

Chapter two will examine the period from the treaty to the end of the Civil War. This period was the most representative of ex-British soldiers on the force through

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<sup>12</sup> Bulmer Hobson papers, MS 13174, NLI.

<sup>13</sup> Mulcahy papers, P7; O' Malley papers, IE P17; Aiken papers, P104; de Valera papers, P150; McEoin papers, P150, all UCDA.

<sup>14</sup> Dail debates 26 March 1924, newspaper clippings, Taoiseach's Dept papers, NAI.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

recruitment into the army. This will show that the skills and experience were needed to conventionalise the army and that their impact was a major factor in the defeat of the IRA and has since been forgotten or disregarded. It will also show that the republican rhetoric and violence continued against ex-servicemen throughout the Civil War. Ernie O' Malley was very critical of the government forces during the war. Although he realised the importance of utilising the skills of ex-British servicemen men on the republican side he still deplored the army and government for doing the same thing and becoming an instrument of the British as he saw it.

Chapter three will incorporate the period after the Irish Civil War and examine its aftermath as regards attitudes towards ex-servicemen. It will show that the use of ex-British soldiers in the army was used as an excuse for intimidation and the mutiny of 1924 and that the service of ex-British soldiers was a major factor in its evolution and military successes during the period

## **Chapter I**

### **INDEPENDENCE 1913-1921**

**‘No responsible spokesman for Sinn Fein ever suggested that because their was a political landslide, then later after the time when the then representatives of the Irish people advocated such cause of Irishmen going to join the British Army at the beginning of the war, that those who went to that war, believing it to be the best for serving their country should be stigmatised’<sup>16</sup>**

Minister Kevin O’ Higgins on the appointment of General W.R.E. Murphy as Chief Commissioner of the Dublin Metropolitan Police.

Prior to 1922 Ireland had had a long tradition of its manhood serving in the military forces of Britain. There was never a shortage of soldiers to man British colonial garrisons around the world or to fight in its many resulting wars. Many generations of Irish families had proud attachments to the British Army even though Ireland had a rebellious tradition of its own. At a certain level Irish society had militarised elements prior to independence and so before 1914 the Volunteers would have had experienced people to fall back on. Between 1913 and 1924 the Irish soldier developed through the auspices a volunteer force, a guerrilla force during the Irish War of Independence and a conventional army during the Irish Civil War and all the time utilising the skills of British ex-servicemen. In this chapter I intend to examine the impact of ex-British soldiers on the Irish Volunteers and IRA and their experiences during the Irish War of Independence.

The formation of the Volunteers was a direct result of the third Home Rule Bill, which was introduced in 1912. Time after time in the course of the Irish revolution radical nationalists had followed the example provided by Ulster Unionists and elements within the British Army.<sup>17</sup> The Volunteers had modelled themselves on the Ulster Volunteer Force, which had earlier been founded to defend Ulster against home rule in Ireland. Both relied on the experience of ex-British soldiers to militarise their forces. A confidential monthly report of the Inspector General for January 1913 to the under secretary for Ireland reveals some of the tensions.

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<sup>16</sup> *Irish Times*, 7 May 1923.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Laffen, *The resurrection of Ireland, the Sinn Fein Party 1916-1923* (New York, 2005), p.411.

‘In Belfast and Northern Ulster the Home Rule Bill continues to be regarded by unionists with apprehension and bitter hostility. A body called the Ulster Volunteer Force is being raised. It is said that the volunteers will furnish a police as well as a military force for service under a ‘Provisional Government’ to be established for Ulster in the event of the Home Rule Bill becoming law’.<sup>18</sup>

Antrim had a noticeable increase in the amount and number of unionist clubs and drilling and route marches with members being taught to use firearms.<sup>19</sup> The Orange Order had taken up the Volunteer movement by May 1913 and urged its members to join, with the cities being divided up into sections over which commanders were appointed in order to quickly mobilise the force.<sup>20</sup> Drill and parades were inspected by the country gentry many of them retired military officers and appeared according to a police report, to be at the head of the movement.<sup>21</sup> By July 1913 a county inspectors report estimated that there was 7000 fairly well drilled men in the Antrim UVF with an alarming slide toward a militant society.<sup>22</sup> A police sergeant in Hollywood, Co Down reported parties of the Ulster force practicing signalling, despatch carrying, scouting, skirmishing, ambulance drill, tent pitching and coding’. Other units were judged by Captain F. Hall, an ex-sergeant Geffrey’s of the Royal Irish Regiment, W.G Ferguson an ex-Sergeant and ex-Quartermaster Sergeant W.F Maxwell late of the Royal Irish Regiment.<sup>23</sup>

The Irish Volunteers did the same and later the IRA also used men with combat experience like Tom Byrne who had fought against the British with the Irish Brigade in South Africa during the Boer War.<sup>24</sup> The most able instructors to the UVF and the Irish

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<sup>18</sup> County Inspectors report, January 1913, Colonial Office papers Colonial Office 904, British in Ireland series (Held in British National Archives but available on microfilm at NUI Maynooth AS941.5, box 89 reel 054), pp 1-9.

<sup>19</sup> County Inspectors report 13 May 1913, Colonial Office 904.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*; the strength of the UVF at this time was thought to be somewhere in the region of 30,000 men.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, pp 389-392, in Fermanagh there was 1246 men, Londonderry there was 3349 men, Monahan had 700 and Tyrone had 3,300 drilled men.

<sup>23</sup> RIC special branch report on secret societies 14 August 1913 to Undersecretary N. Chamberlain Colonial Office papers CO 904, p.398.

<sup>24</sup> Tom Byrne was member of Irish Brigade in S. Africa 1900-02, a captain in the I.V. in 1916 and commandant in the IRA in Dublin 1921 WS 564 BMH NAI.

Volunteers were themselves products of British Army.<sup>25</sup> After the formation of the Irish Volunteers in 1913 emphasis was put on the training of its members, which would be needed in any struggle to defend Home Rule or independence.<sup>26</sup> Indeed the need for these skills and the probable cognisance of what was happening in the North led to military instructions being issued for units of the Volunteers in 1914 to establish along British Army lines. They were to secure the services of a competent instructor utilising all ex-military men possible and the company drill was to follow exactly the drill set out in the British Infantry Manual 1911.<sup>27</sup> When the insurrection occurred in 1916 the Volunteers conducted themselves in a soldier like fashion. Captain E. Gerard of the British Army said ‘ every officer I ever met who was ever in Dublin was so impressed by the extraordinary gallant behaviour of the insurgents.’<sup>28</sup>

Bulmer Hobson made direct correspondence to the British Army and the excellent source of military skills that men trained in that institution with its proximately might provide. He proposed the utilisation of ex-British soldiers and the British manual to train the Volunteers.<sup>29</sup>

## **First World War, Rebellion and Ex-Servicemen**

On outbreak of war with Germany, the Irish Parliamentary Party offered the Irish Volunteers to the crown in defence of Ireland, partly to safeguard Home Rule and partly in response to Carson offering the UVF to fight in the war. The advent of the First World War saw the split in the Irish Volunteer movement, which by this time had reached 180,000 members. The larger portion of 170,00 siding with Redmond and becoming the National Volunteers, many of whom later fought in the Great War. The smaller group had

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<sup>25</sup> Captain Barry O’ Brien, ‘The origins and development of the Cadet School 1929-1979, in *A special edition of the An Cosantor, The Irish Defence Journal*, vol. xxxix no. 9 (Dublin, 1979), p. 260.

<sup>26</sup> Musketry and training in the Dublin Volunteers, Walsh Papers n.4923, NLI.

<sup>27</sup> Bulmer Hobson Papers MS. 13174 (1), NLI.

<sup>28</sup> Captain E. Gerard ADC 5<sup>th</sup> Division British forces in Ireland 1916-21 defended Beggars Bush Barracks 1916 WS 34800 BMH NAI.

<sup>29</sup> Bulmer Hobson papers, MS. 13174, NLI.

become the nucleus of the Volunteer movement and subsequent rebellion of 1916 and War of Independence. This group retained the title of Irish Volunteers and subscribed to the ideology that England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity. The Irish Volunteers who had been inaugurated in the Rotunda Rink in Dublin in 1913 (*Oglaigh na hEireann* in Irish) immediately began placing a precise form of military structure on the organisation. Volunteer units were called 'corps', 'brigades' or 'regiments.' When the first convention of the Irish Volunteers assembled in Dublin on 25 October 1914, it was decided to govern the movement with a general and executive councils.<sup>30</sup>

On 25 November 1914 a committee of military organisations was appointed and tasked with drafting a proposal for the establishment of a General Head Quarters (GHQ). These proposals, which were endorsed by both the Central Executive and General Council allowed for the establishment of a GHQ staff comprising a chief of staff, a quartermaster general and directors of organisations, military operations, training and arms and later a chief of inspection and director of communications.<sup>31</sup>

GHQ was responsible for the overall operations of the Irish Volunteers until the establishment of the National Army in 1922. 1914 also saw the adaptation of the scheme of military organisation, which saw the main volunteer tactical unit designated as a 'company' and so on. The scheme also provided for the establishment of engineer, transport, supply and communications and hospital corps. Volunteer brigades were commanded by a general and consisted of three to five battalions. The Volunteers utilised the British military manual and system and this would follow through to the Irish War of Independence and Civil War.

Already by 1915 many ex members of the Irish Volunteers had taken part in the actions at Gallipoli and various other places wearing British uniforms, while fighting for the crown. While Irish soldiers serving in France were preparing for the great Somme offensive of 1916, back home in Ireland the Irish Volunteers in a bid for independence on

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<sup>30</sup> Gerry White and Brendan O' Shea, 'Irish volunteer soldier 1913-23, in *Osprey warrior series* no. 80 (Oxford, 2003), pp 8-13.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

24 April broke out into insurrection in the Easter rebellion. Roger Casement had already recruited Irish prisoners of war in Germany for the Volunteers, albeit with minimal success, to form an Irish Brigade for the sole purpose of fighting the British. Michael Kehoe the brigade's adjutant was recruited and later fought in the Irish War of Independence, as did Maurice Meade later a section commander in the East Limerick flying column and National Army during the Civil War.<sup>32</sup>

While the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division, John Redmond's so called Irish Brigades suffered massive casualties as a result of gas attacks at *Hulluch* on 27 and 29 April, Irish soldiers in Ireland were dying while fighting each other. The rebel fought soldiers of the very army who would provide them in the future with military experience of a conventional force. The initial days of the insurrection took the government and military by surprise. In many parts of Dublin sympathy was not with the rebels. British soldiers and especially Irish men serving in the British Army had held a level of respect in the country. With the outbreak of war in Europe this was compounded by the fact that many Irishmen were now fighting in that war. There were far too many Dubliners fighting with Irish regiments in France for the population to think that this was the right moment to embarrass England.<sup>33</sup>

The battles of Easter week were a military failure. Irish Volunteers had fought and killed Irish soldiers and ex-members of the Volunteers who now wore British uniforms. Some of those same British soldiers of Irish regiments had been active in the Howth gun running operation two years previous. But after a week of intense fighting and the execution of the rebel leaders public opinion saw the rising as something to be proud of. Albert Resborough, a British soldier at the time, said that the army had respect for the Volunteers they were fighting as they saw them as very professional and disciplined.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Michael J. Kehoe WS 741 BMH NAI & Maurice Meade WS 891 BMH NAI.

<sup>33</sup> Desmond Bowen and Jean Bowen, *Heroic option: The Irish in the British Army* (Yorkshire, 2005), pp242-44.

<sup>34</sup> Albert George Fletcher Resborough, WS 1604 BMH NAI.

But many Irish soldiers serving at the front on hearing of the rebellion felt a greater sense of betrayal than patriotism. Soldiers of 2<sup>nd</sup> Irish Guards, although supporters of Home Rule were not sympathetic towards the rebels. They, after all were fighting for Ireland. Tom Kettle, a British officer at the time, wrote that he was astounded at the news of the rebellion. Many of the leaders had been his friends and he himself was a nationalist. With the executions he said ‘these men would go down in history as heroes and martyrs and I will go down if I go down at all as a bloody English officer’.<sup>35</sup>

Recruitment for the British Army began to drop. There was frequent hostility in Ireland to British soldiers.<sup>36</sup> But at a different level there was discreet co-operation and support offered from serving British soldiers. One such case is that of an army sergeant based in Dublin during 1916. At the outbreak of war Edward Hanley was serving with the Fourth Battalion Dublin Fusiliers and during 1916 was back in Dublin on sick leave from France. He was a store man in Portobello Barracks, Rathmines and while there the Irish Citizen Army asked him to acquire some weapons. Hanley relocated close to a hundred weapons over a period of years without being caught.<sup>37</sup> Soldiers also arranged to have their weapons bought and even stolen by volunteers.<sup>38</sup>

## **Irish War of Independence and Ex-Servicemen**

During 1917 and 1918 the Volunteers, spearheaded by 1916 survivors and released internees, began reorganising. By 1917 the army had started to produce their own training manuals based on the British version.<sup>39</sup> At first there was no real policy to procure arms and what was later to develop into large-scale guerrilla warfare initially took the form of raids for arms. The reorganised Irish Volunteer movement was both anti

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<sup>35</sup> Bowen, p. 244.

<sup>36</sup> Bowen, p. 245.

<sup>37</sup> Edward Hanley, WS 635, BMH NAI.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> The Mulcahy papers contain four training manuals for weapons etc dating between 1917-1919, Mulcahy papers P7a/21, UCDA.

party and anti British.<sup>40</sup> The public reaction to the executions of 1916 was a major factor in consolidating opposition to British rule. This combined with the frustration caused by the failure to implement Home Rule, dissent with the First World War and most of all perhaps the prospect of extension of conscription to Ireland aroused much ill feeling. After the 1918 election and the British contentment to ignore the moves to set-up the Dail and the declaration of independence, the Irish government proclaimed 'that the existing state of war between Ireland and England can never be ended until Ireland is definitely evacuated by the armed forces of England'.<sup>41</sup>

Some in the Volunteer leadership saw the best way of forcing the British out was through the formation of the military through conventional styles of establishment like brigades and battalion structures, fighting decisive battles in fixed position.<sup>42</sup> But this could never have worked because of the resources that the British could rely upon. The 1916 fighting capabilities and the later raid on the Customs House, pushed by de Valera, was evidence enough for that. So nationalist thinking on a new strategy was based around the non-committal of resources to any hastily organised venture.

General Mulcahy, for one, did not believe in large-scale confrontations during the War of Independence although this changed in the Civil War. In 1919 Michael Brennan arranged a general onslaught on the RIC all over his East Clare brigade area for one night and had not informed GHQ. When Mulcahy found out, Brennan was chastised but carried on regardless.<sup>43</sup>

A new tactical doctrine that argued for a move away from large-scale confrontations and towards more mobile forms of warfare using smaller military

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<sup>40</sup> Peter Hart, *The IRA and its enemies: violence and community in Cork 1916-1923* (New York, 1998), p. 46.

<sup>41</sup> M. L. R. Smith, *Fighting for Ireland: The military strategy of the Irish republican movement* (London, 1995), p. 32.

<sup>42</sup> De Valera pushed the idea but Mulcahy didn't believe in the concept of pitching the forces against each other and this culminated in the attack on the Customs House, which turned into a military fiasco.

<sup>43</sup> David Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish life 1913-1921* (Cork, 1998), p. 186; Michael Brennan, *The war in Clare 1911-1921* (Dublin, 1980), p.38.

formations in combat was envisaged.<sup>44</sup> This meant that proper men were needed. It involved getting in close and personal, which not all volunteers could stomach. In the various contributions to the study of the IRA including those by Peter Hart and Sinead Joy's book 'The IRA in Kerry 1916-1921' the question is raised as to whether its members in volatile areas such as Kerry and Cork really were the natural born fighters depicted in nationalist and republican popular traditions.<sup>45</sup> In Kerry for example, volunteers would retreat from ideal ambush sites or get sick during the fight and lie down until the shooting was over.<sup>46</sup> These men had little or no combat experience.

During this period some like Tom Barry for example brought experience to the IRA. The discipline to conduct an ambush or be a part of a flying column may be due in part to the experience of ex-soldiers. Victory in the Irish Revolution and Civil War may owe much more than is acknowledged to British military training and ex-soldiers although others like Ginger O' Connell were quite successful without this background. These people had a different sense of discipline and organisation. The growing number of raids and activities undertaken by the IRA meant more exciting involvement for the rank and file and these operations helped expose volunteers who were more willing and daring than others. This may have been largely as a result of the tendency to rely on men with experience and probably accounts for ex-soldiers among the IRA fighting forces.<sup>47</sup> From a column man's point of view 'if you were not a column man, you were small fry, the whole of the rank and file were a good help, the inactive men stayed at home and the rest of the men were with the columns.'<sup>48</sup> This attitude caused many problems to occur between columns and companies. Activists in Bandon, Fermoy and Kanturk recruited ex-soldiers for their military skills over strenuous local objections.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Smith, p.35

<sup>45</sup> Peter Hart, *The IRA & its enemies*; Peter Hart, *The IRA at war 1916-1923* (New York, 2003); Sinead Joy, *The IRA in Kerry 1916-1921* (Cork, 2005), pp 94-95.

<sup>46</sup> Joy, pp 94-96.

<sup>47</sup> Joost Augusteijn, *From public defiance to guerrilla warfare: The experience of ordinary volunteers in the Irish War of Independence 1916- 1921* (Dublin, 1996), p. 97.

<sup>48</sup> O' Malley papers P17/b/124, 123, UCDA.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

The flying column became the chief offensive weapon of the IRA.<sup>50</sup> The column was supplied with the bulk of the arms available from brigades. According to Florence O' Donoghue 'there was sufficient supply of rifles to arm small columns and those on whole time service could better defend themselves as organised groups than as individuals'.<sup>51</sup> Another advantage of small committed units was that they had the time to train and develop skills, which benefited the movement as a whole. The small columns were far better suited to fighting a war than the vast cumbersome Volunteer organisation. They had virtually all the rifles in the brigade, time enough for training and the incentive to develop military skills.<sup>52</sup>

Ernie O' Malley described a column training camp and instructors mentioning the input of Captain Prout, an ex-American officer, who had been attached to the intelligence squad and also Dermot McManus, an ex-British officer who was attached to the training staff at GHQ. 'Volunteers were trained first for two weeks in the application of arms.'<sup>53</sup> By the end of the period they were trained in the elementaries of the infantry soldier. During parades the ceremony was a mixture of American and British drill.'<sup>54</sup>

With the British committed to a military solution through the reprisal tactics of other ex- British soldiers i.e. the Auxiliaries and Black and Tans (the IRA was guilty of this too) people who could 'try' to do their best to combat them. Barry had been a young soldier in the war.<sup>55</sup> He was one of many Catholic ex -service men who found military or paramilitary employment under a nationalist flag despite the hostility that their war service had provoked.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Robert Kee, *The green flag: ourselves alone*, vol. iii (London, 1972), p. 114.

<sup>51</sup> Florence O' Donoghue, 'Guerrilla warfare in Ireland 1919-1921, in *An Cosantóir* xxiii, no.1 (May, 1963), p. 298.

<sup>52</sup> Fitzpatrick, p.181.

<sup>53</sup> Mulcahy papers contain seven *Oglaigh na hEireann* training manuals produced between 1919-1921, Mulcahy papers P7a/23, UCDA.

<sup>54</sup> Ernie O' Malley, *The singing flame* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Dublin, 1978), pp 20-22.

<sup>55</sup> Tom Barry Officer Commanding Cork no 2 Brigade flying column 1920 -21, Commandant General IRA 1921 WS 1754 BMH NAI.

<sup>56</sup> David Fitzpatrick, 'Militarism in Ireland 1900-1922, in Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery (eds.) *A military history of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1996), p.400.



**Fig.1** An IRA Flying Column during the period. The exact column and area is unknown. (Courtesy Irish Air Corps)

Barry was commander of the West Cork flying column and he later explained his change of allegiance in terms of spiritual conversion. Whereas he had joined the army in 1915 to see what war was like, to get a gun, to see new countries and to feel a grown man, his subsequent enrolment in the Irish Volunteers resulted from his being awakened to his Irish his nationalism whilst serving in Mesopotamia by news of the Easter Rising.<sup>57</sup> This is interesting as it contrasts with the feelings of other Irishmen serving in the British Army at the time, such as Tom Kettle, who felt betrayed. Tom Garvin describes the ex-servicemen and their militarist nature by saying

‘IRA leaders tended to be younger during the War of Independence, which was a general shift in the movement away from the IRB. Many of them had not had any direct involvement with extreme nationalist politics and many had sympathised with the Irish party. Many had had experience in the British Army in World War I. In some ways they were not unlike other members of their generation who had attempted to remain in army life at the end of the war by joining paramilitary associations. In a sense they were not unlike many of the young men in the British forces who had become militarised by the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

war and who had a “contempt for politics”, a “distrust for civilian leadership” and a “warrior mystique”. The distrust was combined with a rebellion against the older generation as being effete, corrupt, un-heroic and above all civilian.’<sup>58</sup>

Although there were other column leaders who had been successful without the background of British military training it was Barry who later became a legendary figure by displaying his experience in the Kilmichael ambush with his West Cork flying column. On 28 November 1920 they wiped out two lorry loads of Auxiliaries on the Macroom to Dunmanway road at a cost of three dead.<sup>59</sup> He held his men in a disciplined ambush close to the road allowing only for attack and not retreat.<sup>60</sup> A grenade and rifle attack was followed by hand to hand fighting after which eighteen rifles and 180 rounds of ammunition were captured including thirty revolvers and some grenades. Barry’s men had gone thirty hours without food. They had marched twenty-six miles and had lain soaked and frozen on exposed rocks waiting in ambush. To remind them that they were soldiers who could not afford to wallow in the luxury of shock Barry drilled them severely amidst the dead immediately after the action and as Peter Hart discusses the killing of prisoners and wounded men. The Auxiliaries lost seventeen dead.

This event has fuelled much debate in recent times with Meda Ryan defending Barry’s actions against the theories of Peter Hart.<sup>61</sup> But the Auxiliary’s supermen image had been dented.<sup>62</sup> The discipline, which Barry had instilled in his men, brought a new edge to the fighting. Although Hart sees Barry’s role differently and explains that on his order British servicemen were shot after they had surrendered.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Tom Garvin, *The evolution of nationalist politics* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Dublin, 2005), PP 142-147.

<sup>59</sup> Duggan, p. 48.

<sup>60</sup> Hart, *IRA and its enemies*, pp 32-33.

<sup>61</sup> Meda Ryan, ‘Tom Barry and the Kilmichael ambush, in *History Ireland*, vol.13 no. 5 (2005), pp14-18; Meda Ryan, *Tom Barry freedom fighter* (Cork, 2003), pp18-22, 31-38.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Hart, *IRA and its enemies*, pp 22-26.

## Issues for ex-servicemen

This use of ex-soldiers is in contrast to 1919, which saw the return of men en-mass from the war, some of whom were given cottages and small holdings. 46% of Irish ex-servicemen were drawing the out of work donations in November of that year.<sup>64</sup> Local boards and county councils all over Munster for example passed resolutions not to employ ex-soldiers.<sup>65</sup> Many of these soldiers had been members at one stage of the original Irish Volunteers. They went to France with the National Volunteers as their way of securing independence. But the returning veterans were not, as a whole, accepted into the ranks of the IRA. Nor were they wholly accepted back into society. They were threatened and boycotted, their houses burnt and the GAA refused them permission to rejoin clubs.<sup>66</sup> Even the legendary Tom Barry, in the beginning, was under constant suspicion, even while a member of the republican movement and while training volunteers.<sup>67</sup>

In November 1920 a report was sent to Dublin Castle on the kidnapping of Daniel Lynch aged 25 an ex-soldier who had been taken from his home at Kilpatrick, in Kilshannen on 5 November by armed and masked men.<sup>68</sup> This was just one incident in a spiral of violence towards ex-servicemen. Jane Leonard estimates that between 1919 and 1924 approximately 120 ex-servicemen were murdered. Some were spies and shot as such. But the majority were innocent and killed as retrospective punishment for their service in the Great War.<sup>69</sup> On the 4 May 1921, Liam Lynch wrote to Mulcahy at GHQ suggesting that in the future the IRA should shoot a local loyalist for each volunteer shot

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<sup>64</sup> Hart, *The IRA and its enemies*, p.312.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Jane Leonard, 'Facing the finger of scorn: veterans memories of Ireland after the Great War, in Martin Evans and Ken Lunn (eds.) *War and memory in the twentieth century* (Oxford, 1997), pp 59-73; Donal Hall, 'World War I and nationalist politics in Louth 1914-1920, in *Maynooth Series in Local History* (Dublin, 2005), p. 47.

<sup>67</sup> Hart, *IRA and its enemies*, p. 148.

<sup>68</sup> Dublin castle report dated 12<sup>th</sup> November 1920 under the Title 'Public control and administration 1884-1921, CO 904, (AS41.5 CO904 Box 168 Reel 091).

<sup>69</sup> Leonard, *finger of scorn*, p.47.

in British custody and although this was probably designed to prevent the enemy from shooting prisoners it may have made it easier to victimise ex-soldiers.<sup>70</sup>

Demobilised servicemen and their families became targets for abuse soon after the Easter rising. By July that year they were fighting 'Sinn Feiners' in the streets of Cork City and other towns. After one incident an ex-soldier was beaten and derided 'as another rejected soldier who sold his country for a Saxon shilling'. He told a reporter 'it is just because I am a soldier. I am in dread of living in my own town'. Another woman declared 'that a soldiers wife would be murdered in the town by the people'.<sup>71</sup>

Republicans saw the recruitment for the British and later the National Army as being almost 'entirely drawn' from the ranks of the undeserving poor: all scruff and corner boys. Ex-soldiers returning from the war were tarred with the same brush. These men along with their wives and mothers - 'shawlies' and 'separation women'- were classed as drunken rabble, and subjected to withering republican scorn.<sup>72</sup> There was little condemnation of shootings and intimidation of members of the police and military forces and ex- servicemen and as we shall see later this carried on throughout the period to the Civil War and after.<sup>73</sup>

After the National Volunteers expired some veterans from this group became some of the most effective guerrilla fighters and officers of the Irish Volunteers.<sup>74</sup> But others with less notoriety contributed to the military struggle. For instance there is the example of Sergeant Martin Doyle who had been awarded the Victoria Cross for destroying the crew of a German gun emplacement 'single handed' with his rifle and bayonet in September 1918. Less than a year later, Doyle was a member of the IRA. Owen Nolan, from Limerick, served with the Royal Horse Artillery. He was wounded

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<sup>70</sup> Valiulis, pp 68-72.

<sup>71</sup> *Irish Times*, 20 July 1916; *Irish Times*, 5 August 1916; Hart, *The IRA and its enemies*, p. 311.

<sup>72</sup> O' Malley papers P17a/34, UCDA; Hart, *The IRA and its enemies*, p. 149.

<sup>73</sup> The Mulcahy papers contain draft orders concerning attacks on enemy NCOs and families of members of the RIC, Mulcahy papers P7/A/19, UCDA.

<sup>74</sup> Bartlett and Jeffery's, p. 400.

and later joined the IRA. He was the last man to surrender to Free State troops at William St. RIC barracks and was interned with Sean T. O' Kelly.<sup>75</sup>

According to David Fitzpatrick veterans who changed allegiance found no inconsistency in reapplying their obedience and skill to new masters. They relished the military life but cared little for the contending rhetoric's of patriotism.<sup>76</sup> Irish men had long been a part of the tradition of military service in the British Army despite the ambivalent relationship between the two nations. Throughout the struggle for independence the training of volunteers in the basic military skills was conducted in a covert if hazardous fashion geared solely towards meeting the immediate requirements for encounters with enemy forces. Post war development of the Irish Volunteers owed more to the British Army than a mere infusion of sympathetic ex-service men. From its foundation the force had followed British Army practice in its organisation and training.<sup>77</sup> As their primary function shifted from display towards combat the Volunteers moved beyond a peacetime militia on parade to the grim practicality of an army of war.<sup>78</sup> This practice and the abhorrence of use of ex-soldiers would come into greater effect with the reorganisation during the Irish Civil War.

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<sup>75</sup> Correspondence with Jerome Tierney, nephew of Owen Nolan, address with author.

<sup>76</sup> Bartlett and Jeffery, p. 400.

<sup>77</sup> Mulcahy papers P7/A/26-33, UCDA.

<sup>78</sup> Bartlett and Jeffery, p. 402.

## **Chapter II**

### **CIVIL WAR 1922-1923**

## Reorganisation and ex-British soldiers

In this chapter I intend to highlight and examine some of the impact of ex-British soldiers on the Irish Army and their experiences during Ireland's Civil War period. The post war British Army had already realised that a large proportion of recruits who joined after the war were ex-soldiers who had acquired a habit of soldiering. Already trained on enlistment they represented material of the utmost utility.<sup>79</sup> On the other hand a major report on the development of the Irish Army up to 1927, produced by the general staff stated that 'whereas other armies had the traditions behind them we have not the advantage of experience and even yet are only in the process of building up our traditions'. The report noted that the vast majority of men who entered the army had primary if inadequate knowledge of military duties and discipline because they came from the IRA and had never served in any regular army.<sup>80</sup>

Theo Farrell states 'that as a result of experience in the IRA and Ireland's guerrilla warfare, traditions were considered practically useless'.<sup>81</sup> The army of 1922-3 modelled itself on the British Army. The army had been born in the midst of a civil war and its leaders were too busy building up the forces strength and fighting for survival to consider the shape it would eventually take. They lacked the knowledge to invent their own organisational structure. It was essential that they adopt some foreign system to model themselves upon and since its armament and equipment was British it was the ideal only model to adopt.<sup>82</sup>

After the treaty the army split along the lines of pro-treaty, Free State National Army forces and anti-treaty, republican or IRA forces. Hart believes that the reasons those volunteers who went Free State Army are mostly due to allegiance to Michael

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<sup>79</sup> Report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into army annual recruiting estimates of effective and non-effective services for the year 1922-3, xii, 46 [C 22 -72], H.C. 1922-3, xiv. 777.

<sup>80</sup> Theo Farrell, 'The model army: military imitation and the enfeeblement of the army in post-revolutionary Ireland 1922-42, in *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, vol. viii, (1997), pp111-128.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

Collins and in which many ex-British soldiers served.<sup>83</sup> In 1923 an army survey of west Cork concluded that the IRA had survived best where Irregulars had strong family connections.<sup>84</sup> As a result acute tensions existed inside the army between ex IRA and ex-British veterans later to develop into the army mutiny of 1924.<sup>85</sup> But comradesly links persisted between many army personnel and the IRA and information continually flowed between the lines.<sup>86</sup> Tom Garvin puts forward a theory that the existence of such leakages exaggerated in IRA minds the internal divisions in the army and perhaps lengthened the period of anti-treaty resistance to government forces.<sup>87</sup>

At the beginning the army had no organised presence in most of the country. Recruitment policy was carefully aimed against reloading the new force with IRA veterans. According to Mulcahy

‘policy involved pouring cold water on the idea that the Free State Army was a preserve for any particular self appointed drops of the national cream. On the contrary only select politically trustworthy IRA veterans would be taken and the policy was to absorb into the new force the best of the disbanded British regiments in a way which will get over any stigma on us for them and get them broken up sufficiently to absorb them.’<sup>88</sup>

The absorption of ex-British servicemen occurred easily despite government soldiers occasionally going into battle with shouts of ‘up the Leinsters’ and ‘up the Munsters’.<sup>89</sup> The absorption of Collins’s men was a greater problem and they were to be disliked not only by their victims but also by the bulk of the army. The real problem, however, was that the army had to expand enormously to take control of the territory of the new state.<sup>90</sup> As a consequence much of the army consisted of untrained, raw and unorganised young men.

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<sup>83</sup> Hart, *The IRA and its enemies*, p. 265.

<sup>84</sup> General situation report 20 September 1923 A/0875 MAI.

<sup>85</sup> For correspondence relating to hidden forces in Free State Army see Mulcahy papers P7/C/3, UCDA.

<sup>86</sup> Tom Garvin, *The birth of Irish democracy* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Dublin, 2005), pp 122-123.

<sup>87</sup> Garvin, *The birth of Irish democracy*, pp 122-123.

<sup>88</sup> Mulcahy papers P7b/149, P7a/140-2, UCDA; *Irish Times*, 17 July 1922; Garvin, *The birth of Irish democracy*, p.127.

<sup>89</sup> Garvin, *The birth of Irish democracy*, p.123,

<sup>90</sup> Garvin, *The birth of Irish democracy*, pp 122-123,

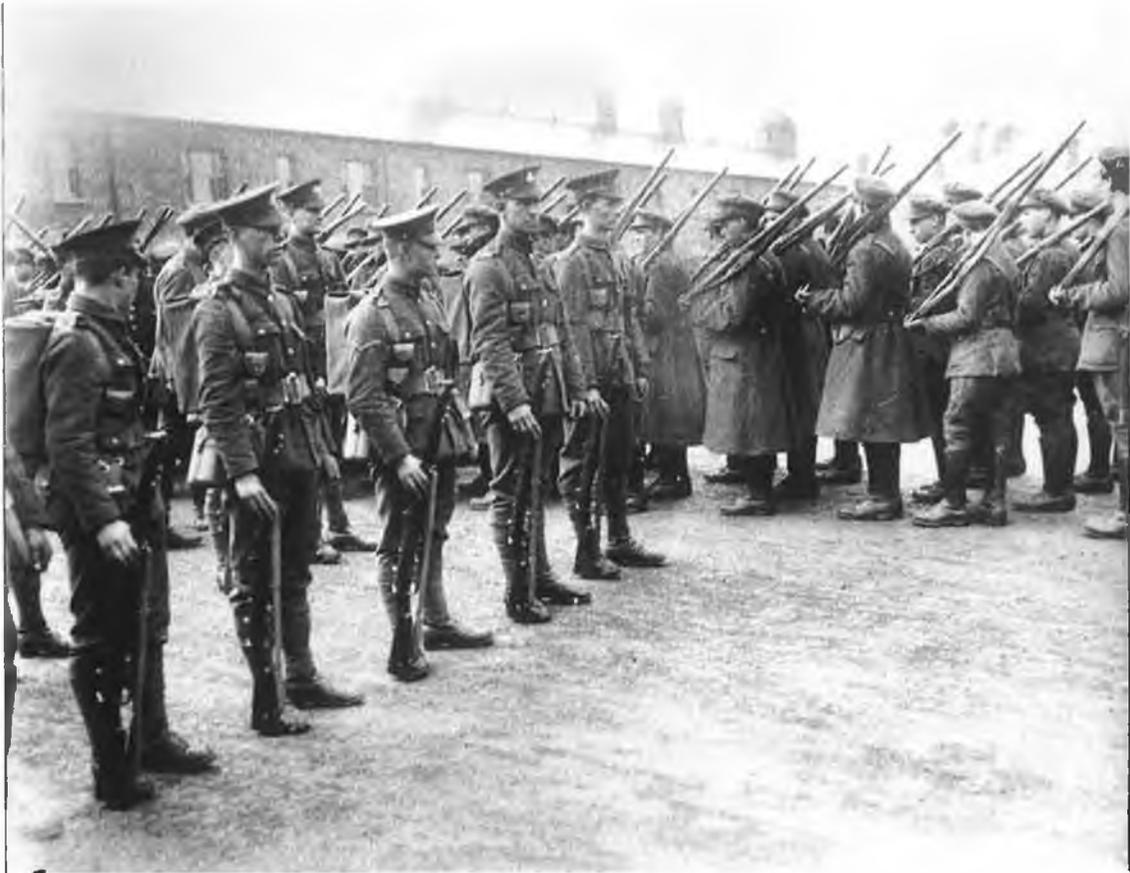


Fig.2 British troops on the left observe Irish Free State troops during the hand over of a military post in 1922 (Courtesy Irish Air Corps)

They were described as being naturally physically brave but ignorant. Officers were unable to read maps. Essentially they were ex IRA guerrillas playing at being regular soldiers whereas in reality they knew only about street fighting, car bombing and private assassinations.<sup>91</sup> The ex IRA army officers knew no military law. The soldiers were often health hazards because of their filthy habits. Sanitation was very bad and medics were unskilled.<sup>92</sup> There was frequent correspondence with GHQ on the standard of government troops.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> For criticisms of National Army see Mulcahy papers P7/B/ 231, UCDA.

<sup>92</sup> Garvin, *The birth of Irish democracy*, pp 122-123.

<sup>93</sup> For example see letter of complaint from Sean O' hEigeartaigh in Cork dated 15 April 1922, Mulcahy papers P7a/173, UCDA.

The army also had other compelling reasons to imitate the British. It contained many ex-British soldiers and probably seemed a natural step, as that was what the rest of the Irish government was doing. Much of the previous British administrative structures and practices had merely been taken over by the Irish Free State. Later with the reformation of the cabinet Liam Cosgrave and Kevin O' Higgins, who were seen by republicans as British puppets, typified the new leaders of the state. Maryann Valiulis has described the Free State government as conservative, anti-army, not terribly committed to the ideals of a Gaelic Ireland, they seemed more willing to mould the new state in the image of British society with token gestures thrown to those who clung to the old ideas.<sup>94</sup> The republican hierarchy expected an internal collapse of the Free State. They despised the government because it was putatively a British puppet regime.<sup>95</sup> Most importantly, the republic was disestablished and an oath of allegiance to the British monarch was included in the constitution of the Irish Free State.<sup>96</sup> This may be one of the reasons for the fomenting of republican opinion against ex-servicemen and the army.

## **Civil War, recruitment and attitudes**

The IRA itself had standards of training and planning and had earlier modelled itself on the British Army partly in response to British intelligence successes. Later during the Civil War the army carried on the same.<sup>97</sup> Mulcahy and his staff began recruiting for a National Army that would be loyal to the new state.<sup>98</sup> Their uniforms were those of the Volunteers, their insignia was that of the Republic, their members were pre-truce veterans but despite these similarities, it was a new army. From its inception the army followed regular military procedure, wore uniforms, lived in barracks, learned drill and standard tactics and was armed with British weapons.<sup>99</sup> Republican's claimed they

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<sup>94</sup> Valiulis, p. 173.

<sup>95</sup> Garvin, *The birth of Irish democracy*, p. 125.

<sup>96</sup> Garvin, *The birth of Irish democracy*, p. 143.

<sup>97</sup> Theo Farrell, p. 126.

<sup>98</sup> Valiulis, p. 128.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

were fighting the same enemy they had only different uniforms.<sup>100</sup> Neither side had money to fight a war, but the government was supported by Britain.<sup>101</sup>

Despite this many commanders felt unable to control their units and the camaraderie between their men and those of the anti- treaty side jeopardised the army's effectiveness.<sup>102</sup> The loose structure of the old Volunteer force made it difficult for many to adapt to the demands of a regular army. The employment of ex-British officers became a necessity.<sup>103</sup> This may be one reason for the recruitment of ex-servicemen to bolster the army.<sup>104</sup> This worked to a great extent because the army showed little loyalty to former IRA members who sided with them against the republican's but who were later demobilised because they were not deemed professional.<sup>105</sup>

With the employment of ex-servicemen army efficiency and discipline improved rapidly. New officers with British experience were sharpening things up in the provinces.<sup>106</sup> General W.R.E. Murphy, Director of Operations was doing remarkable work in Kerry, which went from being one of the most disaffected areas in the state to one of the quietest.<sup>107</sup>

The signing of the treaty on 6 December 1921 was the signal for the disbandment of the five Southern Irish regiments of the British Army. It was asked 'how can there remain in the British Army regiments essentially Irish in every way under present conditions. Therefore they must go at once'.<sup>108</sup> In January 1922 special orders breaking up the sixth division of the British Army in Southern Ireland were signed by Lt General E.P. Strickland.<sup>109</sup> The British War Office declared the Irish command abolished

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<sup>100</sup> Carlton Younger, *Ireland's Civil War* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London, 1986), p. 235.

<sup>101</sup> Younger, p. 278.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, p. 130.

<sup>103</sup> Michael Hopkinson, *Green against green* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Dublin, 2004), p. 138.

<sup>104</sup> Dalton was tasked with recruiting from Legion of Ex-Servicemen, Meda Ryan, *The day Michael Collins was shot* (Dublin, 1989), p. 25.

<sup>105</sup> Theo Farrell, p.126.

<sup>106</sup> Garvin, *The birth of Irish democracy*, p.125.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>108</sup> *Irish Times*, 14 Jan. 1922.

<sup>109</sup> Florence O' Donohue papers, MSS. 31 & 232 NLI.

effective from December 17, 1922.<sup>110</sup> Major General Burton Foster, Colonel of the Royal Irish said ‘...where a Free State exists the troops must belong to the Free State’.<sup>111</sup> By February 1922 the new army was recruiting ex-British soldiers with specialist skills.<sup>112</sup> In July 1922 the Freeman’s Journal had published a poster titled;

**‘FLOCK TO THE FLAG  
HEAVY RESPONSE TO IRISH GOVERNMENT CALL TO ARMS  
IRISH ARMY AUTHORITIES PLANS**

The appeal of the Irish government for volunteers has met with a most gratifying response.

**TRAINED MEN**

Preference is being given to old members of the Irish Volunteers of good character. Next to them will be considered the applications of men who are able to handle firearms. Many of the applicants yesterday bore the stamp of ex-servicemen, who have seen strenuous war duty in other in other lands.<sup>113</sup>

Those officers of the Volunteers who had remained loyal to the state were re-commissioned in the army while others with no connections to the Volunteers were commissioned to train recruits and officers and also for posting to the technical corps (railway protection, repair, coastal & marine engineers etc).<sup>114</sup> These soldiers were important in the Civil War.<sup>115</sup>

According to Hart most army recruits were either ex-British soldiers or civilians and many of them unemployed labourers.<sup>116</sup> One example of their recruitment comes from a memorandum on the army inquiry dated 17 April 1924. It refers to the Railway Protection & Repair & Maintenance Corps and states ‘as the corps grew a certain number of ex-officers of Irish regiments of the British Army were given commissions’.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> *Irish Times*, 6 Jan. 1923.

<sup>111</sup> Patrick McCarthy, p. 333.

<sup>112</sup> For an example of a recruitment poster see O’ Malley papers P17a/257, UCDA; *Freeman’s Journal*, 6 July 1922; recruitment for 12 month period *Irish Times*, 23 Jan. 1923.

<sup>113</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 8 July 1922.

<sup>114</sup> Ministry of defence memorandum for the army inquiry committee dated 17 Apr. 1924, Mulcahy papers P7/B/5 + 54, for memorandum on reorganisation and structure of army see P7/B/189, P7/B/190, UCDA.

<sup>115</sup> Scheme for organisation and training of engineers in Mulcahy papers P7/B/52, UCDA.

<sup>116</sup> Hart, *The IRA and its enemies*, p. 264.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

The recruitment for the army could be sporadic. A report to the cabinet in October 1922 details how General W.R.E. Murphy, while operating in Kerry, was to recruit ex-servicemen, not more than 200 and not after 1 November 1922.<sup>118</sup> In the same report the army's strength was put at 25,000 with 2,286 in various stages of training in special services such as signals, engineers and Lewis gunners are being specially treated.<sup>119</sup>

There may also have been transferrals of people between the two forces as this letter from General Sean McEoin suggests

'Soldier named Fred Cantlone R.A.S.C. military transport company. 15 years service, whole time in transport. 39 years old, 5 and a half years to go to pension and is now under orders to proceed to Belfast. He is anxious to transfer to Irish Army. Saw active service in France & Italy, has much experience'.<sup>120</sup>

But the army rushed people into action without any real preparation. As regards the training and suitability for combat of government soldiers one can get an idea of the preparation of men with no experience and the need for experienced people from a reply to a question asked of Kevin O' Higgins, Minister of Home Affairs at the time,

'on the general conditions as regards recruiting for the National Army there was no definite period of training for recruits outside of large cities such as Dublin, Cork and Limerick until recently. A large number of men did however go through a purely training period of four to eight weeks at the Curragh. Once, outside the Curragh, the responsible officer in charge of his unit was satisfied that a man was fit to handle a gun properly, he was liable for ordinary duty.'<sup>121</sup>

Between June 28 and July 6 1922 sixty-two National soldiers were killed and 277 had been injured.<sup>122</sup> Twenty-four officers and men died of wounds received accidentally since 1 June 1922 and steps were taken to instruct troops in the proper use of arms.<sup>123</sup> The

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<sup>118</sup> Report to cabinet dated 16 Oct. 1922, Mulcahy papers P7/B/258-259, UCDA.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Sean McEoin Papers, P151/149, UCDA.

<sup>121</sup> *Dail Eireann debates*, parliamentary debates; official report, vol.i 6 Dec. - 27 Mar. 1923 (Dublin Stationary Office, 1922), p 2023.

<sup>122</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 7 July 1922.

<sup>123</sup> *Irish Times*, 21 Oct. 1922; P7/B/218 MP UCDA.

senior staff and General Emmett Dalton, an ex-British officer, had been corresponding with a Mr Walker of the Legion of Irish ex-Servicemen to supply ex-British soldiers for service in the army to train its men.<sup>124</sup>

An order for five hundred artillerymen, machine gunners, engineers and signallers was made by GHQ and a further list was made for instructors, weapons experts, military policemen, armourers, aircraft riggers and fitters, drivers and medical personnel. The instructors would receive £5 per week with no specific military rank. They would receive an officer's uniform without rank insignia and maintained at army expense. Other services would be remunerated at rates of pay equal to regular army rates. Technicians would receive extra allowances. Those who previously held rank would retain those ranks. Most of the instructors Walker produced were senior NCOs with up to twenty- nine years service and a variety of skills.<sup>125</sup> This led to an influx of people to the army with some deserting the British forces to join up.

In 1923 the British and Irish governments agreed to exchange information on ex members of the British forces serving in the army.<sup>126</sup> Many had deserted for enlistment in Ireland, which carried on throughout the war and after the mutiny.<sup>127</sup> The British estimated in 1923 that 5,000 soldiers had disappeared in Ireland since 1916 but this was disputed.<sup>128</sup> One report alone listed thirty-four deserters who were serving in the army in one area alone.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Patrick McCarthy, p. 334.

<sup>125</sup> Mulcahy papers P7/B/9, UCDA.

<sup>126</sup> Memorandum no 138 S.2140 Dept of *Taoiseach* files NAI.

<sup>127</sup> Desertion from British Army in Ireland general file 29 Feb. 1924 - 7Feb. 1925 S.3694 Dept of *Taoiseach* files NAI.

<sup>128</sup> Letter from Attorney General Tim Healy to no 10 Downing St governor general's file Dept of *Taoiseach* papers S.3644 NAI.

<sup>129</sup> Colonial Office dispatch 11 June 1924 governor general's file S.3644 Dept of *Taoiseach* files NAI.

## Impact of ex-British soldiers on Free State Army

Many veterans did not leave records of their experiences. As such there is a remarkable absence of any analytical work on the ex-British soldier during the period. Probably one of the more noteworthy of these is Major General W.R.E. Murphy.<sup>130</sup> William Richard English Murphy (1890-1975) was born in Wexford. On the outbreak of the First World War he joined the British Army.<sup>131</sup> He saw action including the Battle of Loos and the Somme. He was an Irish Catholic officer commanding a battalion of English soldiers and in 1918 was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for his actions during the Battle of Vittorio Veneto.

On the outbreak of the Irish Civil War he took up a position in the Irish Army.<sup>132</sup> Initially Murphy conducted a course for senior officers at the Curragh during the summer of 1922.<sup>133</sup> Some of these officers resented taking instruction from an ex-British soldier and some departed ending up on the republican side during the war.<sup>134</sup> He commanded troops under the direction Eoin O' Duffy organising attacks on Republican forces in Bruree and Kilmallock in Co Limerick during September 1922.<sup>135</sup> A report to GHQ congratulated Murphy's handling of the attack saying 'he must be given the credit for a well conceived and well executed attack.' In a statement to the press it was pointed out that 'he considered the capture of Bruree of much strategic value making Kilmallock untenable.'<sup>136</sup> In Tralee in November 1922 he spared the lives of four IRA activists who had been sentenced to death for possession of weapons.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Karl Murphy, 'An Irish general: William Richard English Murphy, 1890-1975', in *History Ireland*, vol. xiii no.3 (Dublin 2005), pp 10-11.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> Karl Murphy, 'General W.R.E. Murphy and the Irish Civil War' (M.A. thesis, NUI Maynooth, 1996), p. 3.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>135</sup> Murphy was contacted by General Gearoid O' Sullivan in 1922 and asked for advice in setting up an National Army, Karl Murphy, (M.A. thesis).

<sup>136</sup> Mulcahy papers P7/B/68, UCDA; Murphy, thesis.

<sup>137</sup> Mulcahy papers P7/B/101, UCDA.

Copy.

2nd November, 1923.

The Secretary,  
Executive Council,  
Government Buildings.

I am directed by the Minister for Defence to refer to the various Colonial Office Despatches relative to the apprehension of British Army deserters alleged to be serving in the National Forces and to inform you that in conversations which the Minister had in London on the 19th ultimo with the Duke of Devonshire, Secretary of State for the Colonies, the following agreement was arrived at:-

*and sent by British Secretary of State  
for War and*

The Irish Government will make every effort to apprehend and arrest deserters from the British Army who seek refuge in Ireland. They will not, however, be called on so to apprehend and return deserters from the British Army who deserted at any date prior to the 1st November, 1923, and gave service in the Irish Forces, whether pro-Trade or in the present National Forces.

I am to state that it is not proposed to take any action against such British Army deserters as have already been arrested and whose cases come within the terms of the agreement referred to. Draft replies will be duly submitted to each Colonial Office Despatch dealing with deserters.

*R. W. O. Connolly*  
RONALD O.

The original of this letter is attached to file S.3034.

**Fig.3** Part of memorandum on apprehension of British Army deserters (Dept of *Taoiseach* papers

NAI)

Murphy had the sentences changed to penal Servitude.<sup>138</sup> The day after he departed from his Kerry command *An Phoblacht* carried an article on him saying

‘that on Tuesday 19 December Gerard Murphy issued a proclamation on the suspended sentences. He was the man who had the power of life and death under English imperial authority, he never took any part in the Irish movement... he was never a Volunteer man, never a Gaelic Leaguer and never in the Sinn Fein movement... the man who was in charge of what is humorously called “the army of the people” in the Kerry area.’<sup>139</sup>

But Murphy’s personal conduct in Kerry was unblemished by accusations of mistreatment unlike other IRA accusations towards Free State officers.<sup>140</sup>

Attitudes to ex-servicemen can be gauged by the case of Lieutenant Colonel Tommy Ryan, assistant to Murphy as deputy G.O.C. operations and training in early January 1923, who was sent to the Curragh for training by General O’ Daly soon after Murphy’s departure. O’ Daly, a Collins man, knew Ryan had commanded a British battalion in France and the Middle East and had been a brigade commander in Egypt in 1918 and this was seen as rubbing salt in Ryan’s wounds.<sup>141</sup>

Connor Brady notes that ‘Murphy was both as brilliant and skilful a soldier as he was an administrator’.<sup>142</sup> But not everyone agreed especially contemporary IRA leaders. Ernie O’ Malley recounts an incident where he knew the movements and actions of Murphy in advance because he had a good grasp of the man’s thinking. He said ‘he could also see that Murphy could move his formations across a map quicker than on rough terrain.’<sup>143</sup> But Frank Aiken said,

‘The Free State preen themselves on the result on the result of O’ Duffy’s campaign. From a military point of view the strategy of the whole Free State campaign was good but

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<sup>138</sup> Mulcahy papers 7/B/72, UCDA.

<sup>139</sup> *An Phoblacht*, 3 Jan. 1923.

<sup>140</sup> References to the Ballyseedy atrocity in which eight republicans were murdered by Free State troops, Karl Murphy, (M.A. thesis), p.49; Joe Galvin an ex-Irish Guards soldier was killed in this incident.

<sup>141</sup> Mulcahy papers P7/C/4, UCDA; Karl Murphy’s theory, Karl Murphy, (M.A. thesis), p. 56.

<sup>142</sup> Connor Brady, *Guardian’s of the peace* (Dublin, 1974).

<sup>143</sup> Ernie O’ Malley, *The singing flame*, p. 168.

the commanders in the field did not handle men in action as well as ours...they relied on sheer weight of lead rather than O' Duffy's or W.R.E. Murphy's tactics.'<sup>144</sup>

Murphy's problem was changing a guerrilla force into an efficient regular army. His preparations for the attack on Kilmallock were hampered by lack of basic military training in the army. Consternation erupted at one stage when Murphy ordered trenches to be dug.<sup>145</sup> General O' Duffy had also complained to GHQ that 'the 300 reserve soldiers sent to his command in July proved absolutely worthless. At least 200 of them never handled a rifle before, were never in the Volunteers nor the British Army.'<sup>146</sup> In Tralee a Captain Roche had to repeatedly arrest drunken officers. The men were not cowards but discipline was very bad.

Some units including the Dublin Guards and the 1<sup>st</sup> Western Division were good but the army needed more people with experience. It was advised that 50% of the officers should be demobbed along with 20% of the troops and that units of ex-British members be formed. It was stated that ex-British NCOs were the best for getting work out of troops.<sup>147</sup> But later on General O' Duffy spoke on the topic of a saturation of ex-soldiers. He was worried about the lack of patriotism and '*esprit de corps*' within the army. 'The only tales that young recruits were likely to hear about past deeds of Irish soldiers in this mercenary army', as he called it, 'were accounts of the Dublin's in Gallipoli from the lips of some ex-British N.C.O.'<sup>148</sup> He argued that

'the army should exploit its rich military tradition and suggested that each battalion select a notable patriot whose portrait would be hung in the mess and whose history the soldiers would study. The result would provide 'something more than a third rate imitation of the British Army dressed in green uniforms and a higher ideal to fight for than a pay envelope.'<sup>149</sup>

But a contemporary report says

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<sup>144</sup> Frank Aiken to MacSwiney 29 April 1924, p. 104/1317, UCDA; Fearghal McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy: a self made hero* (Oxford, 2005), p.110.

<sup>145</sup> Mulcahy papers P7/B/68, UCDA.

<sup>146</sup> General O' Duffy to GHQ, 4 Aug. 1922 Mulcahy papers P7/B/08, UCDA.

<sup>147</sup> Mulcahy papers P7a/141, UCDA.

<sup>148</sup> McGarry, p. 138.

<sup>149</sup> General O' Duffy to executive council, 30 September 1924 P24/222, UCDA.

‘having observed General Murphy as a leader in the field, as an organiser and as a strategist, I believe him to be the most capable officer I have ever met. He is, in addition, popular among the troops, an intelligent disciplinarian and in short, in my belief the one man capable of finishing the campaign. The loss of General Murphy would be more disastrous than the loss of 4,000 troops.’<sup>150</sup>

During the war other ex-servicemen came to prominence. In July 1923 Major General John T. Prout attacked Republican forces in Waterford city.<sup>151</sup> These positions covered the River Suir, which spanned 250 yards using the waterfront as their line of defence.<sup>152</sup> Colonel Patrick Paul, another ex-soldier, produced a plan to cross up river to attack the republican left flank and used artillery to harass their positions. He wanted to break the enemies morale as they had no experience of shellfire and the effects of high explosives on men who had never known them can be imagined.<sup>153</sup> However, this did not stop him inadvertently destroying his own house.<sup>154</sup>

All during the period ex-British soldiers serving in the army were fighting and sustaining casualties just like others in the force. In August 1922, Captain T.J. McNabola was wounded at Boyle. He had served during the European War with the South Irish Horse and the Machinegun Corps.<sup>155</sup> In August, Tom O’ Keefe was killed in a roadside ambush near Mullinavat.<sup>156</sup>

Another ex-soldier is portrayed in the extraordinary case of Company Sergeant Major Martin Doyle.<sup>157</sup> He was one of the twenty-nine Irish Victoria Cross winners of the First World War. He retired from the British Army in 1919 and immediately joined the IRA. He served as an intelligence officer in the mid Clare brigade throughout 1920-1

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid, Karl Murphy believes that the author of the report may have been Kingsmill Moore, the *Irish Times* war correspondent, who had been covertly sending back reports to Desmond Fitzgerald and Kevin O’ Higgins, Murphy thesis.

<sup>151</sup> Paul V. Walsh, *The Irish Civil War 1922-1924*.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid; Carlton Younger, p. 138.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid; Duggan, p. 89.

<sup>154</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 20 July 1922.

<sup>155</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 8 July 1922.

<sup>156</sup> *Irish Times*, 17 Aug. 1922.

<sup>157</sup> *Wexford People*, 13 Dec. 1990; Byrne, Cpl, Liam, ‘An Irish soldier remembered, in *An Cosantóir: The Defence Forces Magazine, special 1916 edition* (Dublin, 1991), pp 28-31.

spending long periods on the run. After the truce he joined the army and was described as someone who could not be replaced without serious inconvenience to the service.<sup>158</sup>

## The Free State Air Force

The two initial officers of the newly formed Irish Free State Army Air Corps were Major Generals Charles Russell and Jack McSweeney. Both had seen service with the Royal Flying Corps in the war.<sup>159</sup> The first aircraft was a Martinsyde A Mk II.<sup>160</sup> The aircraft was purchased in December 1921 by the Provisional Government, in order to bring Michael Collins back to Ireland if the treaty talks should fail.<sup>161</sup> By April 1922 the aerodrome at Baldonnel had been occupied by government troops and recruitment began.

The first thirteen pilots all had war experience. They were Jack McSweeney, Charlie Russell, James Fitzmaurice, Gerry Carroll, Bill Hannon, Fred Crossley, Tom Mahony, Bill de Lamere, Bill McCullagh, Jack Flynn, Oscar Heron, Wilfred Hardy and Lt Arnott.<sup>162</sup> All of these pilots were ex-Royal Air Force and Lt Arnott was later discovered to be an ex-Auxiliary and subsequently booted out of the force.<sup>163</sup>

Sweeney, Russell, Fitzmaurice, Carroll, Mahony and deLamere all became Officers Commanding the Irish Army Air Corps.<sup>164</sup> They developed the service and fought against republican forces throughout the Civil War.<sup>165</sup> Fitzmaurice in particular had served as a foot soldier in the trenches.<sup>166</sup> He applied for pilot training and had just

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> *Irish Independent*, 11 Mar. 1965.

<sup>160</sup> *Irish Independent*, 4 July 1997.

<sup>161</sup> Colonel Ned Broy WS 1280 BMH MA.

<sup>162</sup> Donal MacCarron, *A view from above: 200 years of aviation in Ireland* (Dublin, 2000).

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>164</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 7 June 1922 reported the arrival of an Avro aeroplane to be used in Baldonnel to train Irish airmen and the *Irish Times*, 5 Dec. 1922 reported the first offensive action of an aircraft

<sup>165</sup> For a military assessment on this organisation and army see Mulcahy papers P7/B/43, P7/B/47, P7/B/49, UCDA; *Freeman's Journal*, 7 June 1922; *Irish Times*, 5 Dec. 1922.

<sup>166</sup> Teddy Fennelly, *Fitz and the famous flight* (Portlouse, 1997), pp36-61.

received his wings when the war ended. On return to Ireland joined the Free State Army Air Force and conducted operations against republican forces.<sup>167</sup> See Fig 4

## **Ex-British Soldiers and Legalisation of the Army**

A systematic model was needed for the legalisation of the army. In June 1922 Mr Cahir Davitt, a circuit court judge, was asked by Michael Collins to become judge advocate general to the army. Davitt was under no illusions to the magnitude of the work and established a legal section in the adjutant general's branch, which was responsible for the conduct of courts-martial's and general administration.<sup>168</sup> He recruited a group of ex-British officers as support staff to manage the section based in Portobello Barracks.<sup>169</sup>

The general regulations as to discipline were promulgated as a general order and came into effect on 1 November 1922.<sup>170</sup> There were many technical problems but some defendants at courts-martial were affronted if British Army 'spit and polish' was lacking. Discipline was good amongst ex-British servicemen.<sup>171</sup> But one case was that of an ex-British soldier who General O' Duffy reported to GHQ had been charged with sodomy since the mutiny.<sup>172</sup> The General Regulations were based on the British Army's Manual of Military Law, which Davitt had purchased in Eason's bookstore. The later constituted Defence Forces (Temporary Provisions) Act 1923 was largely based on the British Army (Annual) Act and the Reserve Forces Act of 1889.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> He became famous in 1928 for his part of a crew of three in the successful first East West non stop trans-Atlantic flight between Ireland and the American continent, which took off from Baldonnel in a German Junkers aircraft known as the Bremen.

<sup>168</sup> Duggan, PP 115-137.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, this was done with the aid of George Hodnett, a Major in the Great War, Theodore Cunningham Kingsmill Moore, an ex-RAF officer and defender of Trinity College in 1916, who had been tasked with drafting charge sheets and courts-martial procedures by General W.R.E. Murphy and also John Donovan, Charlie Casey and Thomas Coyne. All were ex-army or R.A.F. with extensive active service in France it was inevitable that British military would dominate the new Irish military code.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid; See also memoranda on penal code in British military law, Mulcahy papers P7/B/56, UCDA.

<sup>172</sup> General O' Duffy to executive council 12 June 1924 O' Duffy papers P24/222, UCDA; McGarry, p.137.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.



**Fig.4** Major James FitzMaurice, 5<sup>th</sup> from left, with some of the first pilots and observers of the Irish Free State Air Force and all ex-Royal Air Force c.1923 (Courtesy Irish Air Corps Museum)

## **Attitudes**

During the Civil War Republican's were incensed towards ex-British servicemen serving in the army. They felt they were fighting the old enemy in the form of the Irish Free State government and army. This can be gauged at a minor level by the attitudes towards the National Army and ex-servicemen from those on the republican bench. This is interesting as some in the British hierarchy held quite similar views to republicans about the army and the inclusion of ex-British soldiers especially in the IRA, albeit in a different context.

On the 9 May 1922 the secretary of state for war was asked 'if his majesty would deprive officers of honorary rank or decoration for gallant service who have joined the rebel army in Ireland to take up arms against the forces of the crown.'<sup>174</sup> But generally people were not sure what was going on and this led to a propaganda frenzy on both sides and used the existence of ex-British soldiers in the army and the oath very effectively. Some in the British government were unsure as to who was funding the war. A question was asked in the House of Commons 'if the British taxpayer was paying for the Free State troops.'<sup>175</sup>

In July 1922 Frank Aiken, commanding 4th Northern Division IRA, outlined the position of his forces reference the treaty and National Army when he asked his men

'for the countries sake not to join the army of the government with that oath in the constitution, no matter what the pay may be or the alternatives to joining are starving or going back to Ulster at a time that the disordered state of Southern Ireland ensures failure....'<sup>176</sup>

The new army and government was seen, by Republican's, as being implicit with the British government and taking an oath of allegiance to the crown merely justified this. After the army attack on the Four Courts, which triggered the Civil War, anti-treaty propaganda denounced the government. Republican propaganda exaggerated the number and role of ex-British officers in the army representing it as a green clad regiment of the British army. However, it had one huge advantage over the British forces of two years earlier, it was Irish and shared with the IRA the local knowledge that the British had lost once the RIC had been paralysed.<sup>177</sup>

There was a divergent view of sympathy towards ex –servicemen. On 9 May 1922 the Freeman's Journal reported the repatriation of the remains of 64 Irish born American

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<sup>174</sup> *The parliamentary debates*, fifth series, *House of Commons*, 10 April -May 12 1922, (vol. 153) (London, 1922), p. 1979.

<sup>175</sup> *The parliamentary debates*, fifth series, *House of Commons*, 20 November- 25 December 1922 (vol.159), (London, 1923), p. 1487.

<sup>176</sup> Frank Aiken papers P104/1247(4), UCDA.

<sup>177</sup> Garvin, *The birth of Irish democracy*, p125.

soldiers, killed in France in the war, to Ireland.<sup>178</sup> Those men had been Irishmen serving a foreign state for some of the same ideals as men who joined the British forces. The government soldiers were believed by republicans to belong to the same under class of ex-British servicemen, which they had derided on their return from the war. They were the victims of the same scorn as they shared all the vices, 'fella's not working, hanging around and hangers on who'd been through the 14-18 war.'<sup>179</sup> The majority of those ex – soldiers, who were the corner-boys and loafers of the towns a few month ago had brought their corner-boy propensities with them into the army and drunkenness and indiscipline are the order of the day.<sup>180</sup> Hart described this for Mallow 'were they have now got the worst type of ex-soldier in the Free State Army, while in Kerry the IRA foes were the drunkard, the traitor, the wife deserter, wife beater, the tramp, the tinker and the brute.'<sup>181</sup>

Some of the more political propaganda was published in *Poblacht na hEireann*, War News, on 30 June 1922 and was probably produced by Erskine Childers. It reads;

**'RALLY TO THE FLAG**

**IT'S A WAR**

**WHO BEGAN THE WAR? HIS MAJESTY'S FREE STATE MINISTERS**

**WHO ARE THEY ATTACKING? THERE OWN BROTHER IRISHMEN OF THE IRISH**

**REPUBLICAN ARMY**

**WHY DID THEY BEGIN THE ATTACK? BECAUSE LLOYD GEORGE AND CHURCHILL TOLD**

**THEM THEY MUST**

**WHO ARE THEIR ALLIES IN THE WAR? THE ENGLISH**

**WHAT ARE THEIR WEAPONS IN THE WAR? ARTILLARY, MACHINEGUNS, RIFLES ETC**

**SUPPLIED BY THE ENGLISH**

**WHAT IS THEIR OBJECT IN THE WAR? TO DESTROY THE IRISH REPUBLIC AND MAKE YOU**

**SWEAR ALLEGIENCE TO THE KING OF ENGLAND AS KING OF IRELAND.**

**PEOPLE OF IRELAND, WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON IN THE WAR, THERE CAN BE ONLY**

**ONE ANSWER YOU ARE ON THE SIDE OF IRELAND.**

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<sup>178</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 9 May 1922.

<sup>179</sup> Intelligence reports, n.d.1922 O' Malley papers P17a/34, UCDA; Hart, *The IRA and its enemies*, p.149.

<sup>180</sup> Hart, *The IRA and its enemies*, p. 149.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*, p. 149.

WE HEAR ON THE BEST AUTHORITY THAT GENERAL MCCREADY IS WITH THE  
PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT ADVISING ON THE WAR'<sup>182</sup>

Genmaral Dalton, Director of Military Operations at this stage had urged the use of artillery on the Four Courts as the use of these guns would have been quite demoralising upon a garrison unused to artillery fire. He was speaking from experience.<sup>183</sup> The government addressed republican propaganda in the Freeman's Journal on 1 July 1922

**'MESSAGE TO THE NATIONAL FIGHTING FORCES FROM GOVERNMENT OF IRELAND**

"False and malicious statements have been made against you. It has been said that British troops have  
cooperated with you'<sup>184</sup>

The Irish Times carried another reply on the 3 July 1922 and this time in the form of an official bulletin from GHQ concerning the men who worked the guns at the Four Courts and issued the previous evening. It reads

'In view of the fact that fictitious stories are being circulated, it is necessary to state that the artillery used against the four courts was under the command of Major General Dalton, who, it will be remembered, entered Mountjoy Prison in an attempt to rescue Major General Sean McEoin last year'.<sup>185</sup>

Erskine Childers was instrumental in arming the Volunteers prior to 1916 on his boat the *Asgard*. He was director of propaganda and publicity and during the treaty talks was secretary to the plenipotentiaries.<sup>186</sup> Childers had service in the Boar War and after 1916 he again served in the Royal Navy. After the war he returned to his republican ideals and was later shot by government forces during the Civil War. Cosgrave and his colleagues did not want to make an exception of him as Childers had made some inflammatory and misleading statements during the treaty debates, which were perceived

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<sup>182</sup> *Poblacht na hEireann War News*, 30 June 1922.

<sup>183</sup> Younger, p. 321.

<sup>184</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 1 July 1922.

<sup>185</sup> *The Irish Times*, 3 July 1922.

<sup>186</sup> Duggan, p. 102.

to provoke many of those who took up arms against the treaty.<sup>187</sup> The Freeman's Journal on 25 April 1922 carried this article,

'There can be but one opinion of Childers attempt to exalt his superior republican virtue by hurling scurrilities from his paper at all Irishmen by flinging mud at men who were risking their lives for this country while he was parading in a British uniform. There is no honest man, whatever his political views may be, who will not feel a spasm of disgust when he finds Mr Childers, the ex-British yeoman, asserting that Michael Collins by marvellous luck, secured a wonderful rebel attack upon himself. He insults not only Irish readers but Ireland itself. Mr Childers may trick himself out with green white and yellow trappings but when his real voice is heard it is indistinguishable from that of the diehards of the Morning Post.'<sup>188</sup>

Of the fifteen men selected to execute Childers only five had loaded rifles. It had been prearranged that the five soldiers with loaded rifles were ex-Great War soldiers, apparently because of their superior marksmanship. Hence his death was instantaneous and the 'marksmanship very accurate.'<sup>189</sup>

When in June 1922 Viscount Curzon asked the secretary for the colonies how many British subjects had been murdered or died of wounds in Ireland since the signing of the treaty he was told that since 6 December 15 RIC, 8 ex-RIC, 8 soldiers and 3 ex-soldiers and 15 civilians had died.<sup>190</sup> This was only the beginning and he was probably unaware of the scale of murder and intimidation that was still apparent in the country against ex-British servicemen. For instance on 15 May 1922 the Freeman's Journal reported the 'shooting dead of a young British soldier in Batchelor's Walk Dublin.'<sup>191</sup> On the 18 May British troops evacuated Portobello Barracks Dublin.<sup>192</sup> On 22 June John Lawless an ex-British Soldier was dragged from his bed on Rutland Street Dublin and shot in front of his wife.<sup>193</sup> On the same day two IRA men shot Field Martial Sir Henry

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<sup>187</sup> Ristead Mulcahy, *Richard Mulcahy 1886-1971: A family memoir* (Dublin, 1999), p.195.

<sup>188</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 25 Apr. 1922.

<sup>189</sup> Mulcahy, p. 196.

<sup>190</sup> Curzon to secretary of state *The parliamentary debates*, fifth series, *House of Commons*, 12 June-30 June 1922, (vol.155), (His Majesty's Stationary Office London, 1922), p.1664.

<sup>191</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 15 May 1922.

<sup>192</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 18 May 1922.

<sup>193</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 1 July 1922.

Wilson in London. Both of his killers, Joseph O' Sullivan and Reginald Dunne, the second in command of the London IRA, were ex-British soldiers. They were caught and later executed.<sup>194</sup> In July Private Rogers, RAF, and Privates Baker and Sutherland were fired upon and wounded in Amiens Street. Rogers died of his wounds<sup>195</sup> On 3 July the Freeman's Journal reported 'the false accusations and lies that "British Tommie's" were operating with the army.'<sup>196</sup>

In the same month at Wallingford England, Thomas Edwin Ramsey an ex-British soldier was charged with inciting a private to steal revolvers for shipment to Ireland and another 'Catholic' ex-soldier was flogged in Belfast Gaol.<sup>197</sup> In December a British officer was kidnapped and the body of James Cleary was found in Tipperary with a note saying he had been shot as 'a convicted spy,' 'spies and traitors beware the first of many.'<sup>198</sup> On the 18 December, Brian Bradley a Catholic ex-British soldier with three years service was taken from his home and shot by unknown men.<sup>199</sup> On 1 January 1923 Pierce Murphy was shot in Waterford by uniformed men dressed similar to the National Army.<sup>200</sup>

In Adamstown, Wexford in March, Lieutenant Thomas Jones, Sergeant Edward Gorman and Volunteer Patrick Horan, all ex- British soldiers were lured to their deaths. While searching for a missing volunteer they were captured after a short gunfight. They marched for a distance before being put up against a wall and machine-gunned to death. Jones was severely beaten before being shot. He was found to have twenty bullets in his

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<sup>194</sup> Peter Cottrell, 'The Anglo-Irish War, the troubles of 1913-1922' in *Osprey Essential Histories Series* (Oxford, 2006), p.85.

<sup>195</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 3 July 1922.

<sup>196</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 3 July 1922.

<sup>197</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 10 July 1922.

<sup>198</sup> *Irish Times*, 7 Dec. 1922.

<sup>199</sup> *Irish Times*, 18 Dec. 1922.

<sup>200</sup> *Irish Times*, 3 Jan. 1923.

body.<sup>201</sup> Another soldier who was wounded in the earlier fight was given aid by the attackers. He had no previous military service.<sup>202</sup> The officer's family believed he was singled out because of his prior service.<sup>203</sup> The 'getting them at last' element of Republican vengeance still rang through during the Civil War.

Although the duality of the service and the victimisation of ex-servicemen was carried out all the way through 1916 to 1921 period, it definitely did not stop during the war. On the whole there was a fomenting of republican opinion and hatred towards them. But in military terms almost all the skill and energy had been displayed by the Free State Army not its opponents.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> These men were shot with Tommy guns, a high volume of fire weapon preferred by U.S. gangsters at the time and used by the IRA, see Mulcahy papers P7/A/22, UCDA; *The Free Press*, 13 Mar. 1923.

<sup>202</sup> *The Free Press*, 13 Mar. 1923.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Laffen, p.411.

**Chapter III**  
**AFTERMATH AND MUTINY**

In this chapter I will highlight the treatment and experiences of ex-British servicemen in the Free State and also how their existence in the army during the Irish Civil War and after was used as an excuse for the mutiny of 1924. After the war many ex-British servicemen felt alienated. In 1928, 150,000 ex-British soldiers were resident in the Irish Free State.<sup>205</sup> Many could not settle back into their lives in Ireland and some with other ex members of the RIC began to emigrate to the colonies of the British Empire, helped of course by the British government.<sup>206</sup> The Irish government was in no hurry to pay for their upkeep and it was unclear who should foot the bill for their medical bills and resettlement.<sup>207</sup> The Federation of Anglo-Irish War Victims was set up to lobby the governments for assistance and compensation for British subjects in Ireland for loss of life and property.<sup>208</sup>

In 1927 the Committee on Claims of British ex-servicemen was set up at 5 Ely Place Dublin. A public notice inviting evidence from organisations of British ex-servicemen was inserted in the press.<sup>209</sup> The committee had assistance from the British Legion, Department of Local Government, Public Health, Land Commission, the Irish Sailors and Soldiers Trust and Organisation of British Ex-Servicemen.<sup>210</sup> There was some claims in respect of service in the National Army who had also served in the British forces but these were dismissed as not being in the terms of reference of the board.<sup>211</sup> In some cases soldiers who had been involved in the Connacht Rangers mutiny in India claimed state assistance and pensions for service to the Irish government.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> *Daily Press*, 12 Dec. 1927; Committee on claims of British ex-servicemen 1927-28 Dept of Justice files Jus 8 NAI.

<sup>206</sup> Resettlement to colonies i.e. Australia of ex-servicemen and ex-RIC, *The parliamentary debates*, fifth series, *House of Commons* 28 Mar. 1922 - 7 Apr. 1922 (vol.152), (His Majesty's Stationary Office London, 1923), p.1158.

<sup>207</sup> Irish sailors and soldiers land trust established under section 3 of the Irish Free State (Consequential Provisions) Act 1922 for the purpose of carrying into effect the provisions of section 4 of the above act 1919, *Parliamentary debates*, *Dail Eireann*, 6 Dec. 1922 - 27 Mar. 1922 (Dublin Stationary Office, 1923), p. 1082.

<sup>208</sup> P7/B/395, P7/B/396 MP UCDA.

<sup>209</sup> *Daily Press*, 12 Dec. 1927, its members were Mr Cecil Lavery KG, Brigadier General R. Browne Clayton, Mr P.F. Baxter and Mr M.J. Beary of the Dept of Finance S. files S.560 Dept of *Taoiseach* NAI.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid*; they wanted training and education for veterans and state assistance, education S4724, training S.4724 S.9701 S.10451 state assistance S.983 Dept of *Taoiseach* files NAI.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>212</sup> John Flannery participated in Connacht Rangers mutiny in India 1921 WS 1221 BMH NAI.

## Loyalty

An Irish Times editorial on January 9, 1922 sheds some insight into a discussion in Dail about the loyalties of ex British soldiers to the new state.<sup>213</sup> Deputy Sean McGarry asked Mr Cathal Brugha, Minister for Defence, what he would say to an ex member of the British Army about his oath to England if he was about to join the Irish Army.<sup>214</sup> His reply was 'that the only oath that concerned him was that oath of allegiance to the Dail and as long as every member of the army kept that oath of allegiance, which he must take when he enters it, then he, Mr Brugha was satisfied'.<sup>215</sup> This oath must have been a bone of contention to many on both sides in the conflict when it came to recruitment of ex-British soldiers. After all those soldiers were seen as the old enemy. But this did not stop many ex-British soldiers changing allegiance from the crown to a sworn loyalty to the Free State although at the same time British soldiers were still being murdered. Three officers and a soldier were murdered in Macroom in June that year and a request was made to allow British officers to carry arms in the Free State.<sup>216</sup>

The anti treaty side continued to fight a guerrilla war while the army at first tried to fight the last war all over again but later took a more conventional posture.<sup>217</sup> The planning, training, logistics, officer ship and general ship of ex-British officers in the army would have brought a different kind of edge. For instance the army had been reorganised on British lines and although it came nowhere to resembling the latter those used to its structure and doctrine would have been able to maximise their military skills to the benefit of the formations they were now in control of.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> *Irish Times*, 9 Jan. 1922.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>216</sup> S.2087 Dept of *Taoiseach* files NAI; The Parliamentary debates, fifth series, HC 12-30 June 1922 (vol. 155) His Majesty's stationary office 1922), pp 3556-7; Compensation of death or injury of members of British forces in breach of truce 10 Jan. 1923-19 Apr. 1925 S.2967 Dept of *Taoiseach* files NAI.

<sup>217</sup> Paul V. Walsh, '*The Irish Civil War 1922-1924: A military study of the conventional phase 28 June-11 August 1922.*'

<sup>218</sup> Accounts of the director of organisation 1921-25 D.E. 3/6/3 *Dail Eireann & Dail Eireann Local Government* files 1919-30 NAI.

General Emmett Dalton, commander of government forces in the Cork area, had been an officer in the British Army.<sup>219</sup> He had served in Europe throughout the First World War with distinction. He was now a very important member of the army hierarchy and he was also very close to Michael Collins the Commander in Chief. There were many other officers like him in the army forces who used their military expertise, learnt in the British military system, to further the aims of the government and military alike.<sup>220</sup> The NCOs and soldiers did the same and also trained and adopted aspects of the army into a disciplined entity in many areas.

## Mutiny

The genesis of the army mutiny of 1924 lay in the circumstances of the army's creation and hasty expansion in 1922/3. There was an internal dispute between old IRA veterans and IRB influence over the direction of the army. Over sixty officers absconded from their posts taking vast amounts of weaponry and other material with them. Although it was not a mutiny in the strictest sense it did however have repercussions.

Winston Churchill, in the House of Commons, had earlier stated that under the treaty an army of between 30,000 and 40,000 men was not seen to have been in excess of the provision, which Ireland is entitled to make.<sup>221</sup> After some time, if special needs arose of a larger force to suppress the present condition of dissent in Ireland the government would feel perfectly at liberty to consider a larger force.<sup>222</sup>

The estimated strength of the army in early 1922 was 25,000, with 2,286 in various stages of training.<sup>223</sup> Beefing up the numbers at that period and just after extracting itself from an independence struggle while forming itself on the lines of a

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<sup>219</sup> Vincent MacDowell, *Michael Collins and the Irish Republican Brotherhood* (Dublin, 1997), pp 69-74

<sup>220</sup> Donal MacCarron, *Wings over Ireland: The story of the Irish Air Corps* (Leicester, 1996), pp6-27; Teddy Fennelly, *Fitz and the famous flight* (Portlaoise, 1997), pp19-118.

<sup>221</sup> See clause 8 of the treaty, *The parliamentary debates* 23 March 1922, fifth series, *House of Commons*, 20 Mar. - 7 Apr. 1922 (London, 1922), p. 643.

<sup>222</sup> *The parliamentary debates*, fifth series, *House of Commons*, 24 July- 4 Aug. 1922 (London, 1922), p. 65a.

<sup>223</sup> For cabinet reports on defence in 1922 see Mulcahy papers P7/B/258-259, UCDA.

conventional force in conflict with a guerrilla force in the field, the army needed men but would not have had a wide pool of experience to dip into. The army needed to draw on the experience of people who had the training to fight this kind of war and train its soldiers and the nearest group were these Irishmen who had come from British service.



**Fig.5** General Eoin O' Duffy front row centre and General Emmet Dalton, an ex- British serviceman, front row right take the salute in Portobello Barracks Rathmines Dublin (Courtesy Irish Air Corps)

If nothing else, they brought an element of discipline and professionalism to the army, which was not always to be accused of such necessary military facets during the war. At a higher level the planning, training, logistics, officer-ship and general-ship of ex-British officers in the army would have brought a different leadership ethos. The IRA must have heeded the importance of ex- British officers to the army as during the conflict Liam Lynch IRA Chief of Staff and a commander in Cork issued orders for all ex-British officers to be shot on sight.<sup>224</sup> It is these feeling towards ex-servicemen that helped fuel the mutiny.

<sup>224</sup> O'Malley papers p17a/22, UCDA.

The committee findings during the army crisis of 1924, which was set up in response to the so called army mutiny and the complaints of its principal leaders, Generals Tobin and Dalton. It found that one of their primary reasons for organising was that they saw their government and especially the army being taken over by British spies and ex-British soldiers who were being given the best and most important jobs while people like themselves who had been dedicated to the cause of Irish freedom and who had fought all the way through the Irish War of Independence and Civil War were now being sidelined in preference for their enemy.<sup>225</sup>

An army report describes some of the prevailing feelings

‘The state of general poverty and distress still continue... in a southern town which provided over 200 recruits for the army in 1922 many of the ex-Irish National Army men (90%) have not had a days work since they were demobilised... They see those that they fought against living in comparative luxury on looted money. A big reaction against the government is the only result to be expected.’<sup>226</sup>

The media post mortem of the mutiny portrayed some of the rhetoric. The Belfast Newsletter stated’

‘...the army regards Michael Collins as its spiritual leader... the were alarmed at the way the national position had been allowed to drift. Ex-British soldiers had been placed in high positions while those who had made government possible were forced out or put in minor positions... the army council had done its best to provoke rash action... The plain truth is that for the safety and stability of the government and the maintenance of law and order in the Free State the gunman element of the army must now be got rid off. The Tobin’s and Dalton’s and all the others who boast that they won the “Anglo-Irish War” are wholly unfitted by what they did in that war and by their claims based on that service, to hold any position of authority whatsoever in a permanent military force. The sooner the Free State government purges the army of all such, the better for itself and the country.’<sup>227</sup>

In an intelligence report to the army chief of staff reference the Irish Republican Army Organisation dated 26 March 1924, Tom Barry is quoted in a speech on the IRA

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<sup>225</sup> Cabinet inquiry into claims of demobilised officers, Mulcahy papers P7/C/2, UCDA; CAB 2/22, NAI; Army mutiny records of commission of inquiry, Dept of *Taoiseach* papers, S. 3678E, NAI.

<sup>226</sup> Fortnightly summary no.18 period ending 10 Feb. 1924, Office of the director of intelligence GHQ to chief of staff 16 Dec. 1924 Mutiny papers Box 1 MAI.

<sup>227</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, 12 Mar. 1924; S.3694 Dept of *Taoiseach* papers NAI.

organisation as accusing the G.O.C. Cork of favouring ex-British officers.<sup>228</sup> In response to these specific complaints the committee heard from a number of people who gave evidence to the enquiry and came to the conclusion that in fact only a few ex-British officers had been retained after the Civil War.<sup>229</sup> They found that the dissidents had used this issue as propaganda to foment dissatisfaction and unite desperate individuals who were unhappy with the demobilisation of the post war army.<sup>230</sup> With the seriousness of the incident to the security of the state the press discussed the situation. The *Morning Post* said,

‘The answer is simple. The summoning of General O’ Duffy is the constitutionalists last throw of the dice... we can not trust the army... they say in effect our only hope is in the unarmed Civic Guard. O’ Duffy knows nothing about war so the DMP will be asked to contribute General Murphy who knows quite a lot about war to the work of rescue. In this way the Imperial Commonwealth of Southern Ireland may be saved for a while.’<sup>231</sup>

According to General Sean McMahon a former Chief of Staff the number of ex-officers from other armies who had been retained in the army was 155, of which 80 had pre- truce service. Of the remaining 75 officers 40 were technical officers with specialised skills, which the army needed such as medical and legal training. Furthermore he estimated that before reorganisation the army had been composed of approximately 25 percent post truce and 75 percent pre truce officers. After reorganisation approximately 90 percent were pre truce and only 10 percent post truce.<sup>232</sup> There is no other real qualifying or contrary evidence for this. But if one estimates that the number of enlisted or ordinary soldiers will always be much greater in number than that of the smaller nucleus of officers needed to lead than one can see that a larger figure of ex-British soldiers with essential experience were involved in the army during the Civil War. If

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<sup>228</sup> Monthly intelligence reports of director of army intelligence to army C.O.S. dated 26 Mar. 1924 refers to IRAO in army mutiny papers, box 1, 08 Dec. 1925- 08 Jan. 1926, MAI.

<sup>229</sup> For an official report of parliamentary debates on facts of the mutiny see Mulcahy papers P7a/129, UCDA.

<sup>230</sup> Valiulis, p. 226.

<sup>231</sup> *Morning Post*, 14 Mar. 1924.

<sup>232</sup> Valiulis, p. 274 One can check the statements of individual officers in the army inquiry papers ie officer commanding Army Corps of Engineers P7/C/18,; Lt Col Ryan commander training and operations P7/C/8 UCDA.

viewed in a manner of military reactionary thinking then one can see that the government needed to build up the army's strength quickly to secure the country.<sup>233</sup>

On the mutiny the Sunday Observer noted,

'The army is lacking a tradition which is the most valuable part of military education...mutiny leaders did not know what they were doing. In the Irish Army very high commands are held by very young men, who have not much experience because the conditions of life in the country have not given a chance for civic qualities to develop such questions as the relationship of the army to the civic power have never been before us to consider. There is said to be the complaint of "Anglicising the army, but of this phenomenon the outside observer can detect little trace except the influence of British drill. All or practically all the important commands are held by men whose only service has been in Ireland against England.'<sup>234</sup>

In a pamphlet published by the mutineers titled '*The Truth about the Army Crisis*' they argued that the army was being built up of largely anti-national elements.<sup>235</sup> Ceasing to be a National Army and being officered by and recruited from ex-British soldiers, some of whom they had fought against in the War of Independence.<sup>236</sup> They also saw active army men who had been active British secret service agents.<sup>237</sup> Many senior officers resigned in protest against demobilisation of old IRA, while ex-British soldiers were being retained.<sup>238</sup> There was even descriptions of 'the Irish loyalists of tomorrow in the Free State' circulated.<sup>239</sup> The 'Tobinites' procured conspiracy theories that the IRB

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<sup>233</sup> N. Army strength was estimated in December 1922 at 72,000-80,000 and some claimed 100,000, General O' Duffy claimed a week before the treaty at 110,000 P7/B/153 MP UCDA; P7/B/189 MP UCDA; Peter Long Thesis.

<sup>234</sup> *Sunday Observer*, 16 Mar. 1924.

<sup>235</sup> Dail debates on army inquiry 1924, Dept of Taoiseach, S.3678A – D NAI.

<sup>236</sup> Cabinet enquiry into claims of demobilised officers in regular army, Mulcahy papers P7/C/3, UCDA.

<sup>237</sup> Dail debates on army inquiry 1924, Dept of Taoiseach, S.3678A –D NAI.

<sup>238</sup> Letters of resignation to president in protest at demobilisation of old IRA while ex- British being retained, Mulcahy papers P7/C/8, UCDA.

<sup>239</sup> P7/B/344 MP UCDA; 'At the time of the boundary agreement a special unit formed in the Curragh under the command of an officer, who had served in the British Army. Its men were all quite of a different stamp from those who were more nationalist in their outlook. Known as the "Border Unit" it lasted for about a year', *The Sunday Press*, 31 Oct. 1965.

was reorganising and had taken control of the army and there was rumours of Masonic influences through ex-British officers protecting their interests.<sup>240</sup>

In reality these officers saw much of their discontent through blinkered eyes and focussed on ex-British servicemen as some of its cause. But these ex-servicemen had helped shorten the war and brought about a semi stable environment. This, I believe, has been the real reason for their impact being written out of Irish historiography.

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<sup>240</sup> Director of intelligence report on OIRA, 6 Nov. 1923 P7/B/140 Mulcahy papers UCDA; O' Halpin, p. 47.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis has highlighted the employment of ex-British servicemen in the Irish Army throughout its evolution with the Irish Volunteers, Irish Republican Army and Free State Army. This study has shown that their involvement may have been one of the factors that helped the IRA during the War of Independence, thus helping to bring the British government to negotiate. This is also true for the Free State Army and its defeat of the IRA during the Civil War. It should be remembered that those ex-British servicemen who played a pivotal role during those volatile years at the inception of the Irish State and all the way through the struggle for independence were Irishmen many of them nationalists and many had originally been members of the Volunteers in 1913. They went to fight for Britain on the promise of Home Rule for Ireland. When they returned they found themselves as outcasts, but some ended up fighting and in some cases actually leading the Irish Army as well as training the force throughout the period, into the IRA and Free State Army.

The Irish Volunteers and IRA was a guerrilla force combating a conventional army in many cases by using British military skills learned from ex-British soldiers. The Free State Army fought the IRA, which it had also evolved from, portraying a conventional military force using many more ex-British soldiers and lessons they had learned from the War of Independence against the British and those learned during the Great War. During the Civil War Republican's were fighting the very men who they had earlier fought side by side with and who knew their strategies and tactics and leaders. The ex-British soldiers helped to transform the army from a guerrilla force into a conventional army. The ex-soldier brought a disciplined edge to the new army as well as the skills to use all the new material and weapons that the British government had provided.

The army recruited many ex-servicemen during the war as policy. After the treaty and the disbandment of Irish regiments in the British Army they had a pool of manpower to choose from. They managed to get the services of many senior officers including those of General's W.R.E. Murphy, Emmet Dalton and others to lead the army, although Dalton had already been a member of the IRA in the conflict with the British.

But their legacy has all but been forgotten. Their stories were never recorded in any other fashion. The Bureau of Military History contains over 1700 witness statements of people who participated or otherwise witnessed events during 1913-1921. There was no such effort on anyone's behalf to take statements or record the stories of those who participated in the Civil War hence there is no real collective of material. As such the impact of the ex-British soldier on the Irish Civil War and army has been written out of Irish historiography of the period. And no effort has been made since to rectify this.

We can sum up some of the feelings towards those ex-British servicemen who served in the Free State Army by looking at how the post war years and the memories of the Civil War affected them by the treatment of one man. When WRE Murphy was appointed as commissioner of the Dublin Metropolitan Police in April 1923 it was in despite of major opposition from the old IRA list of 'objectionables'.<sup>242</sup> After being appointed as commissioner of the DMP he later hoped that he would get the top job in the *Garda Siochana*. But the politics of the time was against him. His service was always appreciated but his past record in the National Army during the Civil War and his service in the British Army may have been too sensitive.<sup>243</sup>

The impact of ex-British soldiers on the evolution of the Irish Volunteers, IRA and especially the Free State Army during the Irish Civil War was instrumental in the origins of the modern Irish Defence Forces and state but has not been really recognised and needs to be re-examined.

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<sup>242</sup> Taoiseach's Department papers S9050 NAI.

<sup>243</sup> Karl Murphy, (M.A. thesis), p.64; Major General W.R.E. Murphy, 'The Local Security Force: its original purpose', in *The call to arms: a historical record of Irelands defence services* (Dublin, 1945), pp 187-191.

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