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'Fit for immediate service': Reassessing the Irish Military Establishment of the Eighteenth Century through the 1770 Townshend Augmentation

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ABSTRACT

The Irish Military Establishment (IME) of the eighteenth century was established in 1699 to protect Ireland from invasion and to secure the Hiberno-Protestant interest from Catholic insurrection. Regiments were rotated to and from Ireland as required, and Ireland played a major part in British strategy as a barracks for its Empire. Despite this crucial role, the Establishment endures considerable historical criticism and is often described as an ill-disciplined rabble. This paper will reassess this negative perception through a case study of the Townshend Augmentation and material held in the returns of regiments in Ireland from 1767-1771.

The Irish Military Establishment (IME) of the eighteenth century was a branch of the eighteenth-century British military which was paid for by the Irish exchequer but remained subservient to the British government and Crown. It was an army that almost never fought a battle on Irish soil, but whose greatest contribution to Imperial military strategy was the supply of soldiers for deployment abroad. Regiments were rotated into and out of Ireland as required, and it is likely that most soldiers in the British army spent at least some time in Ireland. Housed in barracks and tasked to protect an Irish population which at best saw them as defenders of the status-quo and at worst would have viewed them as an occupying force, deployment in Ireland was a unique element of the eighteenth-century British soldier's service.

Despite the commonality of this shared experience across the British army, the IME has been overlooked and neglected by both military and social historians. Historians who engage with the Establishment often emphasise the negatives associated with the

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army in Ireland, describing it as ill-disciplined and prone to desertion.¹ They often quote Lt-Gen Sir Ralph Abercromby who described the IME as 'formidable to everyone but the enemy'.² This negativity has hindered the exploration of themes such as the army-societal relationship, army effectiveness and the nuances of military service in Ireland. This article counters the existing narrative surrounding the IME and offers a more balanced perspective of the army in Ireland which goes beyond these familiar pessimistic assumptions. It takes the form of a case study employing a quantitative evaluation of primary source material relating to the 1770 Augmentation. Military augmentations aimed to increase the size of the army either by adding regiments or increasing the size of existing regiments. These often occurred during wartime, but there were also peacetime augmentations as was seen in 1770. The 1770 Augmentation restructured the size of regiments in Ireland and in the process removed the distinctive 'cadre' system which had kept Irish regiments at a reduced size. This article explains how the data presented chiefly in the regimental returns for the army in the late 1760s, alongside qualitative evidence from newspapers and contemporary accounts, can offer a new, more positive perspective of the IME. By compiling these data into tables, this article provides insight into the size and quality of the garrison and how closely these regiments adhered to anti-Irish recruitment legislation. Furthermore, these tables compare the size and readiness of the IME pre and post 1770, illustrating both the effect of the augmentation, and the effectiveness of the recruiting officers across the IME. This focus on the regimental level allows for the refutation of the historical criticisms which have dogged discussion of the Establishment previously.

In theory, the smaller size imposed by the 'cadre' system should have been the only difference between a regiment of the IME and a sister regiment on the British Establishment. Examination of desertions, postings and discharges show that soldiers

¹Alan J. Guy, 'A Whole Army Absolutely Ruined in Ireland: Aspects of the Irish Establishment, 1715-1773' in *National Army Museum Annual Report [NAM/A4/2/18]*, (1979) pp. 30-43; Alan J. Guy, 'The Irish Military Establishment, 1660-1776' in Thomas Bartlett & Keith Jeffrey (eds), *The Military History of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 211-230; Thomas Bartlett, 'Army and society in eighteenth-century Ireland' in W. A. Maguire (ed.), *Kings in conflict: the Revolutionary War in Ireland and its aftermath, 1689-1750* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1990), pp. 173-82; Thomas Bartlett, 'A weapon of war yet untried: Irish Catholics and the armed forces of the crown, 1760-1830' in Keith Jeffrey and TG Fraser (eds), *Men women and war: Historical Studies XVIII* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993), pp. 66-85; Neal Garnham, 'Military Desertion and Deserters in Eighteenth-Century Ireland.' *Eighteenth Century Ireland / Iris an dá chultúr*, 20 (2005) pp. 91-103.

²Abercrombie quoted in Ian Soulsby, 'The Irish Military Establishment 1796-1798. A Study in the evolution of military effectiveness' (MA thesis, UCC, 2018) p. 23.

came from much the same backgrounds in both establishments, and recruiting and training standards were maintained across the army.³ One major difference identified by Neal Garnham was the speed and willingness with which the regiments adopted reforms. The autonomy of the IME meant that British reforms often failed to be implemented in Ireland, the best example of this being the reforms of the Duke of Cumberland in the 1740s.⁴ This led to the perception that the Irish regiments were less advanced than their British equivalents in the middle of the eighteenth century, when many of the contemporary negative reports of its performance were penned.

Past efforts to refute or refine the existing historical criticisms of the IME have been hampered by the realities of researching eighteenth-century Ireland.⁵ The greatest difficulty stemmed from the incineration of much of the primary source material during the Four Courts fire in 1922. Thankfully, there is still a large amount of information available in The National Archives in Kew, London. This includes the War Office Papers, specifically WO 27, the inspection returns of the British Army in this period. These contain several volumes dedicated to the IME and these offer the most complete window into the real and comparative performance and issues facing the army in Ireland between 1767 and its dissolution in 1801. This study references the documentation in WO 27 relevant to Ireland from 1767 to 1771. This date range provides control years for the pre-augmentation establishment. This control period can be contrasted with the immediate effect of the 1770 augmentation seen in 1771 and provide quantitative and qualitative information as to the impact of the augmentation on the numbers and effectiveness of the IME.

The Foundation and Mission of the Irish Military Establishment

The IME was instituted in the 1699 in the wake of the Williamite War (1688-91). Its strategic objective was to protect Ireland from foreign invasion, whilst also serving as a martial force to defend the Protestant interest in Ireland from insurrection. It was agreed that 12,000 men would be maintained in Ireland, paid for by the Irish Exchequer and commanded by an independent high command in Dublin.⁶ This was the largest

³Andrew Cormack, *'These Meritorious Objects of the Royal Bounty' The Chelsea Out-Pensioners in the Early Eighteenth Century*, (Great Britain: Self-Published, 2017) pp. 339-344; Garnham, 'Military Desertion', p. 101.

⁴Garnham, 'Military Desertion', pp. 91-2.

⁵Kenneth Ferguson, 'The army in Ireland from the Restoration to the Act of Union' (PhD thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 1980); Charles Ivar McGrath, *Ireland and Empire 1692-1770* (London: Routledge, 2012); Ian McBride, *Eighteenth Century Ireland, the Isle of Slaves*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2009) pp. 36-48.

⁶J.A. Houlding, *Fit for Service, The Training of the British Army 1715-1797* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 46-7.

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source of expenditure for the Irish Exchequer throughout the century, but fears of French attack rendered it a worthwhile expense in the eyes of the Protestant elite.

While its primary objective was the prevention of French invasion, this threat existed more in the minds of Irish Protestants than reality.⁷ The Royal Navy was a strong deterrent to invasion, and the prospect of coordination between Catholic Jacobites and a French invasion was slim, particularly after the battle of Culloden (1746). Prior to the 1798 Rebellion, French soldiers only landed in force once: at Kilrost in 1760. From there Francois Thurot's expedition captured the town and castle of Carrickfergus after a valiant but brief defence by the poorly equipped garrison led by Lieutenant Colonel John Jennings. Thurot's men then demanded supplies from nearby Belfast which had been hastily fortified by the local militia. As the army in Ireland mobilised, the French reboarded their vessels and were eventually ambushed and sunk by a Royal Navy squadron off the Isle of Man.⁸

This episode was the army's sole engagement with an invading force pre-1798 and as such, the 'military' preparedness and effectiveness of the IME is difficult to gauge. This is confounded by a paradox between the battlefield performance and alleged poor quality of the IME. Since the garrison was rarely needed to defend Irish soil, most military actions were seen when regiments were rotated out of Ireland. These regiments conducted themselves adequately on campaign. The ill-fated expedition of General Edward Braddock in 1755 involved the 44th and 48th Foot, which had recently arrived in America from Ireland and were described as showing 'great spirit and zeal for the service'.⁹ Other IME regiments performed well in America, such as the 27th and 46th at the battle of Carillon (1758), and seven IME battalions were trained for a proposed siege of Louisbourg in 1757.¹⁰ Clearly a more nuanced picture of Irish service's impact on military performance is needed and given the rarity of battles on Irish soil, effectiveness of the IME should also be measured through interactions with Irish society.

From its inception in 1699 to the 1730s, the IME was primarily deployed in support of the Revenue Commission, aiding Revenue Officers and suppressing bandit activity in the countryside. Whilst these activities were unpopular among both soldiers and

⁷James Kelly, "Disappointing the Boundless Ambition of France': Irish Protestants and the Fear of Invasion, 1661-1815.' *Studia Hibernica*, 37 (2011), pp. 27-105.

⁸Neal Garnham, *The militia in eighteenth-century Ireland: in defence of the Protestant interest* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2012), pp. 60-1.

⁹Stanley Pargellis (ed), *Military Affairs in North America, 1748-1765: Selected Documents from the Cumberland Papers* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1936), pp. 82-3, quoted in Houlding *Fit for Service*, p. 356.

¹⁰Houlding *Fit for Service*, pp. 364-5.

society, the relationship was at least stable, and recorded incidents of soldierly unrest tended to be self-contained and restricted to inner mutinies such as can be identified in the 1710s.¹¹ This changed in 1739 when ten regiments of foot were transferred to Britain and later to the West Indies and America.¹² Each of these needed 25 new soldiers which were taken from the regiments which stayed behind.¹³ Only twelve regiments of foot and ten regiments of cavalry remained, and they were confronted with a rise in urban unrest, particularly in Dublin. The capital's garrison was repeatedly called upon to suppress disturbances prompted by factions such as the 'Ormond Boys' and 'Liberty Boys'.¹⁴ The depleted garrison was hard-pressed to deal with these disturbances, and increasingly resorted to violence when confronted, leading to civilian deaths. The situation reached a nadir in 1750, when the army was ordered to clamp down on illicit cloth markets used by the Liberty Boys whilst also being ordered to adopt a *laissez faire* approach to the rioting in the capital.¹⁵ The Liberty Boys were outraged, joined forces with the Ormond Boys and rampaged through the streets of the capital. Though the army-societal relationship slowly improved during the 1750s, the outbreak of the Seven Years War saw history repeat itself.

The British army performed adequately during the Seven Years War, but the experience of the garrison in Ireland during the war was far from illustrious. Demands for soldiers abroad stretched the Irish garrison again, with ten regiments being shipped out of Ireland in 1755. The soldiers who remained became increasingly ill-disciplined. Local newspapers reported incidents of soldiers misbehaving, often with violent consequences. In Limerick in 1762 five soldiers of General Brown's regiment were arrested and gaoled for fracturing the skull of a corn merchant and robbing him of his day's earnings (six guineas).¹⁶ That same year in Belfast a grenadier of Lord Forbes Regiment was judged to have committed wilful murder after he fractured the skull of a passer-by with his hanger.¹⁷ Even the return to a 'full' regimental complement in 1764 failed to curtail the ill-discipline. Tuckey recalls one incident in April 1770 whereby two soldiers of the 55th Regiment who were quartered in Castle Island, Cork

¹¹For examples of these mutinies see: The British Newspaper Archive (BNA) *Newcastle Courant*, 24 March, 1712 p. 2; National Library of Ireland (NLI), SP 63/367, p. 3368, 23 June 1711; NLI, SP 63/370 p. 3369, *Examination of D. Shrewsbury*, 16 May 1714; Francis H. Tuckey, *Tuckey's Cork Remembrancer; or Annals of the County and City of Cork*, (Cork: Osborne Savage and Son, 1837), pp. 125-6.

¹²Houlding, *Fit for service*, pp. 410-414

¹³BNA, *Belfast Newsletter*, 19 June 1739, p.3.

¹⁴James Kelly, *The Liberty and Ormond boys: Factional Riots in Eighteenth-Century Dublin* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005).

¹⁵Kelly, *The Liberty and Ormond boys*, p.38; BNA, *Belfast Newsletter*, 10 June 1750 p.2

¹⁶BNA, *Dublin Courier*, 6 December 1762, p. 1.

¹⁷BNA, *Dublin Courier*, 8 November 1762, p. 2; *ibid.*, 15 November 1762, p. 1.

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approached a priest and asked him to marry one of them to a local girl. The priest 'peremptorily refused' which threw the soldier into a fit of rage, and he stabbed the priest 'in such a manner that there was no hope of him recovering'.¹⁸ These incidents did little to foster a positive army-societal relationship.

Given this pattern of violence carried out by a depleted garrison particularly after severe reductions, a simple solution could have been the proper garrisoning of the country, and the prevention of the IME being overstretched. However, there was a numeric and practical reason as to why the garrison was stretched so thinly which traced back to its inception. This was the practice of maintaining Irish Establishment regiments at a smaller level than their English counterparts in a manner which J.A. Houlding dubbed the 'cadre' system.

The Cadre System

The cadre system was central to the experience of the regiments of the IME and revolved around the dual premises of cost-saving and efficiency. Its core tenet was the reduction of the number of soldiers in the ranks of each regiment in Irish service, whilst maintaining the officers at full strength. In theory, if Imperial demand or invasion threat warranted it, these Irish regiments would be able to recruit rapidly and train soldiers around this core of officers and veteran troops. This kept costs down during peacetime and allowed more regiments to be maintained in Ireland for less.¹⁹

This system had several serious issues. Firstly, regiments in Ireland were expected to number only 280 compared to a nominal strength of 500 for regiments elsewhere.²⁰ Additionally, there was an absurdity in expecting regiments in Ireland to rapidly recruit, whilst basing them in Ireland where, with limited exceptions, the recruitment of Irish Catholics was illegal, and the recruitment of Protestants was strongly discouraged.²¹ This forced IME regiments to look elsewhere for recruits. The only immediate short-term solution was to 'draft' (transfer) men from regiments that would remain in Ireland before shipping out for service elsewhere. This devastated the remaining regiment, which would be miniscule and unable to replenish its numbers easily. General Edward Harvey was a vocal critic of this drafting process and considered it a

¹⁸Tuckey, *Tuckey's Cork Remembrancer*, p. 155.

¹⁹Houlding, *Fit for Service*, pp. 49-51.

²⁰Thomas Bartlett, 'The Augmentation of the Army in Ireland 1767-9', *The English Historical Review*, 96, 380, (July 1981), p. 540.

²¹Houlding, *Fit for Service* p. 46; Stephen Conway, *War, State and Society in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 90; Peter Way, 'Militarizing the Atlantic World: Army discipline, coerced labor, and Britain's commercial empire', *Atlantic Studies*, 13, 3 (2016) pp. 345-369 (pp. 345-6).

'murdering system of destroying your regiments'.²² It was apparent that by the 1760s the cadre system had become an inconvenience rather than a clever method of cost-cutting. Even the supposed savings of the system came under scrutiny, as a parliamentary debate from 1763 demonstrated. That year, wartime inflation had caused 42 regiments to be placed on the establishment which increased costs by £150,000 since 1757.²³ The Lord Lieutenant, George, fourth Viscount Townshend, recognised that reforming the army in Ireland would mean fewer regiments would be needed to defend the island, reducing these inflated costs, and preventing drafts. To this end, he began to campaign for army augmentation in 1767.

Thomas Bartlett has already undertaken a detailed case study of Townshend's role in the augmentation negotiations from 1767-9.²⁴ In contrast to later reformers such as the Duke of York in the 1790s, Townshend prioritised numerical reform. His objective was to increase the number of soldiers in each regiment in Ireland to 480 while shrinking British regiments from 500 to that figure. This first bill failed, but it paved the way for a substantially revised proposal in October 1769. Of consequence was the decision that the new size of regiments in both Ireland and Britain was to be fixed at 442 men.²⁵ The passing of the modified bill in 1769 showed that the cadre system had become obsolete. Additionally, this augmentation also presents an opportunity to reassess the overwhelmingly negative image of the IME. By examining the establishment before and after this augmentation using regimental returns, it is possible to explore regimental size, quality, discipline, and recruitment practices within both a reduced and a newly augmented IME and see whether the army in Ireland in the late 1760s and early 1770s was as ineffective as often portrayed.

The pre-augmentation establishment

Regimental returns within WO 27 conveniently provide quantitative and qualitative data in 1767, the same year negotiations for augmentation began. Table 1 offers a stark illustration of the impact of the cadre system on the IME. Only 7,020 men (excluding officers) made up the IME that year across 21 regiments of foot, four horse and eight dragoons. Given that the country was not involved in any European conflicts, this is still a startlingly small garrison, far fewer than the nominal 12,000 men. Even the addition of the officers would still mean a garrison of fewer than 8,000 men.

Despite the garrison's small size and the disciplinary issues mentioned earlier, the remarks in WO 27 show that from the perspective of military effectiveness, the pre-

²²Guy, 'The Irish Military Establishment', p. 228.

²³Sir James Caldwell, *Debates Relative to the Affairs of Ireland: In the Years 1763 And 1764* (London: n.p., 1766), pp. 300-1.

²⁴Bartlett, 'The Augmentation of the Army', pp. 540-559.

²⁵Houlding, *Fit for Service*, p.129, n. 60.

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augmentation garrison in Ireland in 1767 was in good condition. These returns reviewed many measures of a regiment's performance, and there was a comprehensive effort by the reviewers to carefully scrutinise each regiment in the establishment. For example, the 56th Regiment of Foot was described as follows:

Officers: Salute well and are very attentive

Men: Not tall but well proportioned and well dressed

Arms: Good, perfectly clean

Accoutrements: Clean and well put on, but not of the best

Cloathing [sic]: Well fitted, hats well cocked

Exercise: Performed the manual exercise well and in just time. Performed several firings with great exactness and quick in loading.

Review: The Regiment is in good order, well taken care of and fit for immediate service.²⁶

Each return advised whether the subject regiment was fit for immediate service, and the Irish garrison reviewed well in 1767. Not one regiment of Horse or Dragoons was declared unfit for service, and only two regiments of Foot were judged as such. These were the 45th and 49th Regiments. The 45th was severely depleted following service abroad, though the 49th had no such excuse and appeared to just be of poor quality (Table 1). Two Dragoon and two Foot regiments were deemed to require work before being considered battlefield ready but were not categorised as 'unfit for service'. The rest (seventeen Foot, six Dragoon and two Regiments of Horse) were all declared either fit for service or in good condition. Four regiments were not given a review officer's opinion that year.

²⁶The UK National Archives, Kew, (TNA), WO 27/11, 56th Regiment Remarks 1767.

Regiment of Foot	Total	Regiment of Dragoons	Total	Regiment of Horse	Total
1st Batt Royal Reg.	288	Royals	207	1 st	129
5 th	227	8 th	136	2 nd	133
18 th	288	9 th	137	3 rd	131
38 th	265	12 th	135	4 th	125
39 th	226	13 th	135		
40 th	241	14 th	131		
44 th	221	17 th	137		
45 th	169	4th Light	133		
47 th	287				
48 th	283				
49 th	266				
50 th	224				
51 st	279				
55 th	274				
56 th	218				
58 th	270				
61 st	233				
63 rd	254				
64 th	286				
65 th	281				
69 th	271				
Total	5,351	Total	1,151	Total	518
Grand Total	7,020				

Table 1: The Irish Military Establishment²⁷

From the perspective of the military, the IME was undermanned but serviceable. Houlding suggested that the nature of service in Ireland provided scant incentive to ensure a high standard of training, yet even pre-augmentation regiments in Ireland were well drilled and ready to be added to and sent on campaign.²⁸ This correlates with newspaper reports from the year before which describes the garrison performing well during public reviews, much to the delight of the crowds who gathered to watch. The regiments were praised for the ‘exactness’ with which they performed their

²⁷TNA 1767 WO 27/11

²⁸Houlding, *Fit for Service*, p. 57.

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manoeuvres, but exactness did not equate to perfection. The review of the Royal Irish and Royal Scottish regiments of foot ended in disaster when:

During the firing this day in the Royal Square, one James Stuccor, a linen carrier from the county of Antrum (sic), was shot in the upper part of his breast by a musket ball, and killed on the spot; and a soldier was wounded on the knee, and in so dangerous a manner that it is thought his leg must be cut off and he was carried to the infirmary. The deceased had gone to the barracks to see a relation, and has left a wife and four small children behind him.²⁹

Though the military may have perceived itself to be a fine body of men, the disciplinary issues, mishaps and deteriorated army-societal relationship reported in newspapers indicate that the military were not as problem free as they liked to portray. Nonetheless, the IME was not on the cusp of falling apart in the run up to the augmentation as implied in the traditional narrative, and most of its regiments were fit for service.

By the time the augmentation was approved in 1769, the IME had grown slightly, but this was due to the presence of 23 regiments of foot rather than 21 (Table 2). The regiments were of much the same size they had been in 1767, except for the 48th which had shrunk considerably. New arrivals in the shape of the 42nd, 27th, 28th, 53rd, 54th, 57th and the depleted 62nd replaced the 1st Battalion Royal Regiment, the 18th, 39th, 65th and the 69th. The newcomers had been reduced in the Irish manner, and it is against this baseline of Table 2 that analysis detailing the numerical effectiveness of Townshend's reform can be set using the data compiled in Table 3 for 1771, as no records exist for the regiments of foot in 1770.

²⁹BNA, *Dublin Courier*, 27 June 1766, p. 1.

Regiment of Foot	Total	Regiment of Dragoons	Total	Regiment of Horse	Total
5 th	261	Royals	207	1 st	132
38 th	261	8 th	137	2 nd	133
40 th	269	9 th	138	3 rd	133
44 th	249	12 th	104	4 th	128
45 th	245	13 th	138		
47 th	259	14 th	136		
48 th	153	18th Light	117		
49 th	278	17th Light	130		
50 th	284				
51 st	268				
55 th	279				
56 th	271				
58 th	237				
61 st	247				
63 rd	269				
62 nd	120				
27 th	250				
28 th	279				
42 nd	278				
46 th	283				
53 rd	260				
54 th	271				
57 th	256				
Total	5,827	Total	1,107	Total:	526
Grand Total:	7,460				

Table 2: The Irish Military Establishment³⁰,

³⁰TNA 1769 WO 27/17

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Numerical impact and the maintenance of quality.

The increase in the size of a marching infantry regiment prompted by the 1770 augmentation was adopted immediately by the IME. 2,649 extra soldiers were added between 1769 and 1771 (Table 3).

Regiment of Foot	Total	Regiment of Dragoons	Total	Regiment of Horse	Total
9 th	262	Royals	207	1 st	131
5 th	381	8 th	138	2 nd	133
24 th	392	9 th	138	3 rd	133
38 th	409	12 th	135	4 th	133
40 th	407	13 th	138		
44 th	415	14 th	137		
45 th	382				
47 th	400	18th Light	135		
48 th	369	17th Light	135		
49 th	409				
50 th	412				
55 th	407				
63 rd	401				
34 th	376				
62 nd	367				
27 th	401				
28 th	377				
42 nd	229				
46 th	392				
53 rd	404				
54 th	424				
57 th	390				
Total	8,406	Total	1,163	Total:	530
Grand Total	10,099				

Table 3: The Irish Military Establishment 1771³¹

This increase includes the net loss of one regiment of foot, with the 28th, 51st, 61st and 58th regiments being replaced by the 9th, 24th and 34th regiments. Most of the regiments

³¹TNA WO 27/23, 1771

of the IME had come acceptably close to the new standard of 442 men.³² Likewise the new augmentations allowed the army to almost reach the target of 12,000 men set out in its inception, without inflating the numbers of regiments on the Establishment. More impressively, the regiments succeeded in maintaining high standards of drill. Only one dragoon and one foot regiment were deemed unfit that year.³³ Given the large influx of new recruits this was impressive and suggests a rapid and effective rate of enlistment and training among the IME during this augmentation period.

Given Ireland's role as an Imperial barracks, it is perhaps unsurprising that the officer corps in Ireland was able to recruit and train regiments to a high standard rapidly as shown in 1771.³⁴ The experiences of the 49th and 45th regiments of foot make for an interesting case study. As mentioned, these regiments were deemed unfit for service in 1767. The 45th Regiment arrived in Ireland that year having spent twenty years in North America.³⁵ It was described as, 'A regiment not yet disciplined, not well appointed and unfit for service.'³⁶ By 1768, things had already improved, with it said that 'This regiment labours under disadvantages. It is composed mostly of recruits and hath suffered greatly by desertion, at present it is not fit for service, but probably will soon by the care of the Lieutenant Colonel.'³⁷ By 1769, the regiment was transformed from what was seen in 1767, and the reviewing officer identified the role which its officers had played in this: 'This regiment is much improved since last review, the officers salute better, the men are steady, well dressed and has a better air, and by the care of the officers the young men will make it a compleat [sic.] fine regiment against the next year, and fit for service.'³⁸ Newly invigorated, the 45th spent two years in Ireland performing more strenuous activities and reviewed well again in 1771: 'This regiment marched well and manoeuvred well and fired well, and must by its appearance have very good care taken of it. This regiment had but just joined from

³²It was rare for a regiment to be maintained at 100%, ~90% was far more common. See Houlding *Fit for Service* p. 128.

³³The 54th Foot was reviewed by Major General Parson who wrote: 'It has laboured under several disadvantages a great dispersion of quarters last year, and 3 companies of the regiment only joined at Galway 3 days before the review, after a long march from Ballyshannon into the County of Antrim. The day they were seen was a very bad one, but the materials are good, and their being assembled this year in one quarter at Galway will it is apprehended and make a considerable alteration in the appearance of the regiment against the next review.' TNA, WO 27/23, 1771.

³⁴McGrath, *Ireland and Empire*, p. 166.

³⁵Houlding, *Fit for Service*, p. 295.

³⁶TNA, WO 27/11, 1767.

³⁷TNA, WO 27/14, 1768.

³⁸TNA, WO 27/17, 1769.

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their separate quarters and have 233 men from under eighteen to twenty years of age. Under the circumstances it is as fit for service as can be expected.³⁹

This success story was repeated in the 49th Regiment of Foot, which was also deemed unfit for service in 1767. Almost every aspect of this regiment was lambasted, from its men 'Low size, ill proportioned and awkward under arms' to its clothing being 'Indifferent and ill-fitted, hats ill-cocked'.⁴⁰ The summary read: 'The Lieutenant Colonel, having presented to me, that the men were not sufficiently instructed, to go through the manual exercise or perform their firings.'⁴¹ Much like the 45th it saw slow positive change. Whilst still unfit for service in 1768, there were signs of improvement 'This regiment cannot in any particular be yet called a good regiment, or fit for any service, but it is mending daily by the extreme diligence and good conduct of its Lieutenant Colonel.'⁴² By 1769, the 49th had improved substantially.

There is a total change in this regiment since the last review, and that for the better, the officers are more alert, the men better dressed and disciplined, are of a taller size, very steady and attentive and have a more soldier like appearance, great care has been taken of them, and by the next year will undoubtedly be fit for service.⁴³

These two regiments illustrate the positives and negatives of service in Ireland for the maintenance of battle-ready regiments. Although the drafting required by the cadre system, surprise deployments elsewhere and the separation of regiments across Ireland were clearly detrimental, the concentration of officers allowed for the rapid improvement of regiments which had, upon their arrival in Ireland, been rendered strategically useless by long service in hostile conditions. This spoke of the quality of recruiting and drilling of the regiments in Ireland in this period which were clearly no less inferior than those in Britain or elsewhere in the Empire.

Recruitment in Ireland and WO 27

Regiments in Ireland found themselves in an unusual position when faced with the prospect of recruitment during the eighteenth century. Despite being based in Ireland, they were unable to recruit Irishmen of any denomination into its ranks consistently. These obstacles came from a series of legislative restrictions which can be traced back to the Treaty of Limerick in 1691. The Protestant establishment in Ireland was concerned with the possibility of a Catholic uprising, either independently or in

³⁹TNA, WO 27/23, 1771.

⁴⁰TNA, WO 27/11, 1767.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²TNA, WO 27/14, 1768.

⁴³TNA, WO 27/17, 1769.

support of a Jacobite invasion.⁴⁴ This fear led to the imposition of anti-recruitment legislation across Ireland for both Protestants and Catholics. Restrictions for Catholics were easy to justify and aimed to prevent the Catholic majority from acquiring weapons and military training. Fear also restricted Protestant recruitment. Since the IME's regiments were required to serve Britain abroad rather than permanently defend the Protestant interest, there was always a chance that a Foot regiment made up of Irish Protestants would be rotated out of Ireland. It was believed that if Protestant numbers were to decrease in this manner, it could encourage a Catholic uprising. While the officers may have been locals, legislation dictated that the soldiers themselves were, as Charles Ivar McGrath described it, alien.⁴⁵

Given the desire among Protestants and indeed some Catholics to serve in the military, it is unsurprising that there were several attempts to circumvent the restrictive legislation. Localised Protestant recruitment was allowed in times of crisis, particularly in Ulster where a reduction in Protestant numbers was less of an issue. The first hints at an official willingness to lift Catholic restrictions only came during the Seven Years War, as demand for soldiers reached new highs. One of the most comprehensive was the proposal for a 'Roman Legion', an effort driven by Lord Trimleston in 1762 to recruit Irish Catholic infantry regiments for service in Portugal.⁴⁶ The proposal was for seven regiments to receive training *en route* to Portugal and to be armed on arrival. This was to prevent armed and trained Catholics being present in Ireland at any point during this operation. This Portuguese proposal received approval from both Whitehall and Dublin Castle, highlighting the need for recruits and the changing attitude towards the anti-Catholic Penal Laws. However, it was stopped by suspicious Irish parliamentarians who refused to arm Catholics, even in such a controlled setting.⁴⁷

The restrictions forced regiments in Ireland to either recruit in Britain or bend the rules. The letters of Nicholas Delacherois, an Hiberno-Huguenot officer in the 9th Regiment of Foot, describe the loopholes which were exploited by regiments in Irish service in the 1750s. While tasked with recruiting for his regiment in Scotland, he wrote to his brother and asked him to corral Irishmen in his name and ship them to Scotland where he could legitimately enlist them into the ranks.⁴⁸ To avoid trouble

⁴⁴Stephen Conway, 'War, Imperial Expansion and Religious Developments in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland', *War in History*, 11, 2 (April 2004) pp. 125-147 (128-30).

⁴⁵McGrath, *Ireland and Empire*, p. 178.

⁴⁶Conway, 'War, Imperial Expansion' p. 137.

⁴⁷McBride, *Eighteenth Century Ireland*, p. 352; McGrath, *Ireland and Empire*, pp. 148-9.

⁴⁸The National Army Museum, NAM 7805 – 63, *The Letters of Nicholas Delacherois to his Brother Daniel during his second year of service in the Ninth Regiment*, pp. 18-19.

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with the authorities, he urged his brother not to issue them uniforms of any kind. He confessed to not having his colonel's permission to do this, but he believed that he could raise 'twenty men in the North (*of Ireland*) for one here'.⁴⁹ He was not the only officer to recognise this lucrative source of recruits, and he observed that at least fifty Irishmen passed through the town heading to other regiments in Scotland.⁵⁰ Delacherois' experience provides a vivid example of the kinds of rule bending employed by regiments when faced with a dire need for new men.

It is important to note that the cavalry was an exception to these rules, and by 1769 up to and over 90% of certain dragoon and horse regiments were Irish (Table 4). These were overwhelmingly Protestant, and the continuity of their deployment in Ireland meant they were not seen as a risk to Protestant stability in Ireland.⁵¹ This is reflected in the fervour and alacrity with which dragoon regiments policed Whiteboys and other agricultural protestors in the latter half of the 18th century. These regiments had a vested interest in the preservation of the status quo, as many of their ranks and officers were from the Protestant ascendancy.

Regiment	English	Scottish	Irish	Foreign	Total	% Irish
Royals	0	0	207	0	207	100
8 th	3	5	128	0	136	94
9 th	2	2	133	0	137	97
12 th	1	0	134	0	135	99
13 th	4	10	121	0	135	89.6
14 th	5	1	125	0	131	95.4
17 th	97	7	26	7	137	19
4th Light	0	3	130	0	133	98

Table 4: Nationalities of Dragoons in 1769⁵²

The potential for a case study of army recruitment through the regimental returns in TNA file WO 27 has already been recognised by Houlding.⁵³ His analysis focussed on the percentage of recruits in the establishment as well as the rapidity with which the IME was able to fill its ranks from 1770 onwards. Less attention has been paid to the men filling those ranks, and careful analysis of WO 27 allows for examination of both

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 28.

⁵⁰Ibid., p.28.

⁵¹Bartlett 'Army and Society', p. 175.

⁵²TNA WO27/17

⁵³Houlding, *Fit for Service*, pp. 127-30.

the nationality and quality of the recruits that joined regiments in Ireland from 1770-1. It is also a practical illustration of the effectiveness of the legislation designed to prevent Irish recruitment in the eighteenth century and to what extent regiments employed tactics such as those described by Delacherois in 1757-8.

Regiment	English	Scottish	Irish	Foreign	Total	% Irish
5 th	187	11	62	1	261	23.75
38 th	142	42	67	0	251	47.18
40 th	90	135	41	3	269	15.2
44 th	119	74	45	11	249	18.07
45 th	113	92	31	9	245	12.65
47 th	144	19	85	11	259	32.81
48 th	95	16	41	1	153	26.8
49 th	141	81	54	2	278	19.42
50 th	173	60	50	1	284	17.61
51 st	180	47	38	3	268	14.18
55 th	114	129	36	0	279	12.90
56 th	100	118	53	0	271	19.56
58 th	144	40	51	2	237	21.52
61 st	208	19	20	0	247	8.1
63 rd	224	23	21	1	269	7.81
62 nd	53	5	62	0	120	51.67
27 th	177	13	57	3	250	22.8
28 th	225	8	37	9	279	13.26
42 nd	0	278	0	0	278	0
46 th	181	60	33	9	283	11.66
53 rd	202	34	24	0	260	9.23
54 th	201	51	17	2	271	6.27
57 th	219	20	16	1	256	6.25
Total	3,432	1,375	941	69	5,817	16.18

Table 5: Nationalities of the Foot in Ireland in 1769 (excluding officers)⁵⁴

⁵⁴TNA WO 27/17

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Regiment of Foot	English	Scottish	Irish	Foreign	Total	% of Irish
9 th	200	35	25	2	262	9.5
5 th	288	11	80	2	381	21
24 th	311	20	60	1	392	15.3
38 th	245	65	99	0	409	24.2
40 th	175	178	51	3	407	12.5
44 th	189	153	61	12	415	14.7
45 th	130	176	71	5	382	18.6
47 th	176	18	186	20	400	46.5
48 th	192	84	93	0	369	25.2
49 th	228	92	88	1	409	21.5
50 th	253	96	60	3	412	14.6
55 th	178	160	69	0	407	17
63 rd	307	66	26	2	401	6.5
34 th	272	90	12	2	376	3.2
62 nd	247	16	101	3	367	27.5
27 th	247	26	124	4	401	30.9
28 th	269	7	89	12	377	23.6
42 nd	0	229	0	0	229	0
46 th	279	33	73	7	392	18.6
53 rd	272	99	33	0	404	8.2
54 th	297	61	62	4	424	14.6
57 th	265	66	58	1	390	14.9
Total	5,020	1,781	1,521	84	8,406	18.1

Table 6: Nationalities of the Foot in Ireland in 1771⁵⁵

The data for 1769 shown in Table 5 details both the composition of regiments in the garrison and how strictly restrictions against Irish recruitment were adhered to. Every regiment had at least some Irishmen in service, except for the uniquely Scottish 42nd Foot. Although only 16% of the soldiers in military establishment were Irish in 1769, some regiments had figures far higher than that. Of note are the 5th, 27th, 49th, 56th and 58th, all of which had around 20% Irish in their ranks. The 38th, 47th and 62nd had even higher percentages. Though the 62nd was severely depleted in 1769, the 38th had no such excuse and this suggests that some regiments did recruit more Irishmen than others. Several of the new arrivals since 1767 such as the 53rd, 54th and 57th all had low

⁵⁵TNA WO27/23

percentages of Irishmen compared to the average, indicating that the temptation recruit Irish soldiers was far stronger if the regiment served there for longer.

A significant conclusion which can be drawn from the WO 27 records of 1771 is that the proportion of Irish soldiers in regiments in Ireland increased during the mass recruitment drive by 2% (Table 6).⁵⁶ Almost 600 more Irishmen were recorded that year, and no regiment which increased in numbers from 1769 did not recruit Irishmen during the 1770 augmentation. Even the 53rd, 54th and 57th, all of which had had extremely low numbers of Irishmen, engaged in the practice. Of these three, the 53rd only recorded an additional 9 (6% of 144 soldiers added) soldiers, but the 54th and 57th recorded 45 (29.6% of 152) and 42 (31% of 134) Irishmen respectively.

It is important to acknowledge that most of the soldiers recruited were still English and Scottish. Even the heavily depleted 62nd regiment which enlisted 240 soldiers between 1769 and 1771 only took on 39 Irishmen (16%). Nonetheless, the quantitative data shows that despite restrictions of Irish Catholics and Protestant recruitment, the practice continued regardless among almost every regiment. The WO 27 data cataloguing the mass recruitment drive of 1770-1 illustrates how it came down to the individual regiment's officers to monitor who it recruited into its ranks, and some followed the rules more closely than others. However, most regiments which bent the rules kept their regiments fit for service, as outlined previously. The need for soldiers and the enlistment of 'illegal' Irishmen did not detract from the readiness of the army in Ireland.

Recruit Quality and Desertion

The continuation of Irish recruitment is but one element of the augmentation which can be traced through WO 27. It is also possible to consider the quality of soldiers recruited, and to demonstrate that recruitment standards slacked in 1770-1. From 1768 onwards the number of recruits is recorded for most regiments. This data shows the number of soldiers accepted into the ranks since the previous year. It also details the number of soldiers who were rejected from the ranks, who deserted, died or were drafted elsewhere. When these variables are considered, 52.1% of potential Foot recruits in 1768 were deemed fit for service, rising to 53.87% in 1769 and climbing further to 68.9% in 1771.

There are several possible explanations for this. Increased monitoring of recruiting through reports such as those found in WO 27 could have led to increased efforts by

⁵⁶The rotation of regiments into and out of the country continued, and those new arrivals contained more English and Scottish recruits, the 9th Regiment of Foot being a prime example. Likewise, regiments rotated out of Ireland did have high Irish percentages, such as the 56th. See Tables 5 & 6.

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recruiting officers to find suitable recruits. Conversely, the need for more men to fill the ranks after the implementation of the augmentation may have led to an establishment-wide reduction in the standards expected of new recruits. This hypothesis is illustrated in the 27th Regiment of Foot. In 1769 the regiment was discerning, only accepting 83 into the ranks, with 56 deemed unsuitable for service, three dead, 23 deserting and fifteen discharged.⁵⁷ In 1771, the regiment adopted a far more generous attitude to its large influx of 180 men. Despite losing twenty to desertion, discharging five and admitting to one dying in service, none are mentioned as being unfit for service.⁵⁸ This implies that high demand for recruits led to a drop in recruiting standards. This laxity may also explain the increase in the number of Irish in the ranks in 1771. The need to reach the expected quota outweighed the need to prevent Irishmen from enlisting. Therefore, during the Townshend augmentation, quality control was side-lined by a need for quantity, and it is telling that although 4,136 soldiers were recruited in 1771 compared to only 1,394 in 1769, more soldiers were rejected for not being of acceptable standard in 1769 (372 to 362).

In the eighteenth century the raw recruit was a common sight among deserters.⁵⁹ Desertion in the IME is a controversial topic, and the results are confusing across various secondary and primary sources. For example, Garnham quotes Tom Bartlett who claimed that 8% of the IME deserted in 1769.⁶⁰ According to WO 27, only 391 Foot (6.62%) deserted, leaving 5,849 men still in the ranks of the infantry. Adding to the confusion, each regiment reported their deserters with varying degrees of accuracy. Some even combined their deserters with their regimental dead.⁶¹ Though inconsistencies exist across WO 27, it is possible to draw interesting comparisons between the desertion figures offered twice within each regiment. The first set of data include all deserters since last review and is found on the third page of each regiment's return. The second number specifies desertions among new recruits and is recorded on page five of each return. This information is again focussed on the regiments of Foot, as the cavalry were far more stable across the sample period.

It is safe to assume that the 'recruit' desertion figures were encapsulated in the regimental figures offered in each return. There are two exceptions to this. Both the 27th and 28th arrived in Ireland in 1768 and suffered 33 and 38 deserters during that year's recruitment efforts. Their regimental return lists four and fourteen deserters in the same time frame. It is conceivable that due to the radical restructuring these

⁵⁷TNA, WO 27/20, 1769.

⁵⁸TNA, WO 27/23, 1771.

⁵⁹Ilya Berkovich, *Motivation in War, The Experience of Common Soldiers in Old-Regime Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) p. 59.

⁶⁰Garnham, 'Military Desertion', pp. 91-103 (p.92).

⁶¹TNA, WO 27/14, 1768.

regiments underwent after their service abroad, that the figures were listed separately due to administrative error or other consequence. This is the only instance in which this occurs, and further discussion will presume that recruitment desertion figures were included in the regimental figure given in each return.

Year	'Recruit' Deserters	Total Deserters	% of deserters which were recruits	Total Recruits	% of total recruits which deserted
1768	219	309	70.87%	1,786	12.3%
1769	145	391	37.08%	1,394	10.4%
1771	545	1,121	48.60%	4,136	13.2%
Totals:	909	1,821	49.92%	7,316	12.42%

Table 7: Deserters and recruits in Regiments of Foot of the IME⁶²

Between 1768 and 1771 1,821 deserters were recorded in the regimental returns of WO 27, with 1,121 (61.56%) of these desertions taking place in 1771 (Table 7). When examining the recruit returns across the same years, 909 men are mentioned as having deserted with 545 of these taking place in 1771 (60%). The ratio of deserters to recruits remained consistent during this period as well, suggesting that a total loss rate of approximately 12% was acceptable across the regiments of Foot in Ireland (Table 7). The stability of this desertion rate among recruits despite the massive surge in recruiting numbers suggests that the officers of the IME were able to balance volume and quality effectively. Given that the desertion loss rate increased only slightly in 1771 despite the number of enlistments doubling that year, the IME's pragmatic attitude to the standard and nationality of its recruits did not detract from the maintenance of the military's effectiveness.

Conclusion

While the IME lacks source material when compared to the British army in the eighteenth century, WO 27 offers an opportunity for a new, positive perspective of the IME. Both WO 27 and newspaper reports describe a force which was more militarily competent than is usually presented. Most regiments on the garrison were fit for service and the fact that a high standard was maintained throughout the augmentation process speaks well of the quality of the training of regiments in the Irish establishment. This is a different image of the IME compared to that seen in the traditional historical narrative.

When the augmentation was implemented, the IME was able to achieve its target and have most of their regiments fit for service in an acceptable timeframe, illustrating the

⁶²TNA WO 27/14 1768, 27/17 1769, WO 27/23. 1771.

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effectiveness of the officers and recruiters in the establishment. The consistency of the level of desertion among recruits, both before and during the augmentation, speaks favourably of the officers of the IME and questions the assumption that regiments which were based in Ireland were doomed to plummet in quality. Moreover, even while under the pressure of an augmentation, Irish recruiting officers balanced quantity and quality and continued to train and discipline recruits to an acceptable standard. Finally, the statistical data contained in WO 27 provides an insight into the clandestine recruitment of Irishmen into the army for the second half of the eighteenth century and illustrates the futility of anti-Irish recruitment laws given the needs of the military from 1756 onwards.

Historians' reliance on familiar negative quotes and portrayals have led to the assumption that a regiment in Ireland was of an inherently inferior quality to one serving elsewhere during the eighteenth century. It is true that service in Ireland was unique and came with its own set of challenges. The garrison's reputation with its host society was compromised in no small part by the actions of the soldiers themselves in the second half of the eighteenth century. Soldiers were obliged to handle civilian unrest frequently, were rarely called to action and were unsure how long they would be garrisoned alongside their unwilling hosts. Despite this, it was still a competent body of soldiers, albeit prone to ill-discipline. This closer analysis explains an apparent paradox, as had the Irish garrison been as inferior as believed, it could not have fought as well as it did when called upon for service across the colonies and empire.