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## Chapter 3

# A Lost Heritage: The Connaught Rangers and Multivocal Irishness

John Morrissey<sup>1</sup>

The soldier's true reward is the gratitude of his fellow-countrymen, and that we have in full measure obtained. Ireland will not easily forget [our] deeds – *Major Bryan Cooper, 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Connaught Rangers, Gallipoli, 1917.*<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

A few years ago, I asked a first year class at National University of Ireland, Galway about their knowledge of the Connaught Rangers. With over two hundred students in the group and being in the heart of Connaught, I reasoned that the odds were fair to good that somebody at least would have heard of them. 'Were they a rugby team?' someone tendered. 'A cricket side perhaps?' said another. 'No, they were an ice hockey team' boomed my final wifful suggestion from the back before I felt compelled to tell them. I should not have been surprised, of course. The Connaught Rangers, as a former Irish regiment in the British Army, were simply never destined to figure prominently in any dominant cultural narrative in post-independent Ireland. However, the general public's absence of knowledge about this marginalised Irish 'experience' raises significant questions about the functioning of Irish 'heritage' and the prioritisation of Irish 'history', not just in post-independent Ireland but also in the modern era.

In recent years, a flowering of interest in what is now widely termed 'Irish cultural studies' has served to produce a curious amalgam of stories/voices from Ireland's past, along with all its intriguing tensions. Despite this, however, many of these more complex and conflicting narratives continue to not feature as the voices of Irishness deemed component parts of Irish heritage and identity today. In this chapter, I explore one narrative of Irishness that has been marginalised and largely erased from public memory, namely the Irish regiments in the British Army of the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I specifically look at the heritage of the Connaught Rangers and the manner in which their multiple and conflicting stories reveal the broader ambiguities of the Irish experience of British colonialism, and point to ways in which the diversity of Irishness can be celebrated by recognising marginalised voices and simultaneously disrupting prioritised senses of Irish history.

## **Ireland and the Politics of Memory**

The multiple stories of thousands of Irish men and women who served as active agents of British colonialism at home and abroad in various military and administrative positions over three centuries have been effectively erased from public memory in post-independent Ireland. Aspects of the 'Irish Empire' within the British one are essentially forgotten (Jeffery, 1996). Numerous artefacts of Ireland's associations and interconnections with Britain are also hidden from the public realm (Johnson, 1999, 2003). Ireland's multifaceted experiences of colonialism and its taking up of the 'white man's burden', as Kiberd reminds us, are rarely even recognised (Kiberd, 1997, p. 97). Furthermore, many are still offended by calls for engaging and recounting Ireland's involvement in the theatre of the British Empire and its armies. Indeed, calls for recognition of these 'lost voices' of Irishness are often taken as political statements – particularly in the context of Northern Ireland – and are still sensitive even in a modern era (Officer, 1995; Ó Muiri, 2003).<sup>3</sup>

In retelling these stories, there is a danger of simply attaching a resurrected memory of British Army Irish regiments to a celebration of the broader 'glories' of imperial or colonial expansion. It is important to remember, then, that the incorporation of Irishmen into the British colonial project was both a partial integration and not without contradictions and ambiguities. In the context of the British Army, this is borne out by evidence of the frequent discriminating or Othering of Irish troops. Commissions, for example, were typically given to those from privileged Protestant and Anglo-Irish backgrounds (Denman, 1992; Jeffery, 2000). During the Great War, contemporary commentary from George Bernard Shaw and others attest that many Irishmen's desires to fight were 'repulsed' by Dublin Castle's 'refusals to give commissions to Roman Catholic officers, or to allow distinct Irish units to form' (Shaw, 2001, p. 1).<sup>4</sup>

In examining the experiences of the Connaught Rangers, I have been particularly mindful of the pitfalls of essentialising Irishmen's location within, and engagement with, British colonialism.<sup>5</sup> Seeing Irish/British relations in a one-dimensional manner – whether that be Ireland as part of the advancing empire or the subjugated colony – serves merely to inhibit an elucidation of the most conflicting elements of the Irish past and eschew an interrogation of the more fluid spaces and practices of British colonialism in modern Ireland. A more relevant and fruitful task is to critically examine the multiple motivations, experiences and tensions of Irish involvement in the British Empire, to hear their voices and to add their 'stories' to our understanding of some of the most important moments of Irish history.

Given the sensitivities and challenges of narrating a heritage for an Irish regiment in the British Army, this chapter takes as its point of departure a key notion – that recognising and representing these marginalised voices of Irishness does not equate to prioritising a particular element of Ireland's past over another but rather to situating this narrative as a component part of a broader, multivocal Irishness. To this end, I am concerned here with (re)presenting one aspect of the multiplicity of Ireland and positing it in a necessarily complex and conflicting

framework that recognises the island's contradictions and interconnections both within and beyond. It is in this context that I argue that Ireland's heritage of involvement in the British Army and broader associations with Britain can be re-imagined so that 'instead of obsessive re-iteration of the past as justification for the present or historical amnesia or wilful forgetting, the past can be remembered differently' (Nash, 1999, p. 476).

### **The Connaught Rangers: A Diverse Heritage**

In the wonderful late nineteenth-century painting 'Listed for the Connaught Rangers' by Elizabeth Thompson (Lady Butler), seen in Figure 3.1, we see a Rangers recruiting sergeant marching two new recruits 'out of the west'.<sup>6</sup> Amongst other sentiments, we gain a strong sense of two juxtaposed worlds. First, and in the foreground, we can envisage a world of the metropole, the uniform and the drum, which one of the recruits appears content to enter. Second, and in the background, we see the mountains, bogs and desolate houses of Ireland's western periphery, which the other recruit glances back at regretfully before leaving behind. In many ways, the juxtaposed but nevertheless inter-related worlds suggested in Lady Butler's painting mirror the ambiguities and tensions of Ireland's association with, and indeed place within, 'the Empire'. That frequently problematic relationship was embodied by the men of the Connaught Rangers and other Irish regiments.

The first battalion of the Connaught Rangers was raised by Colonel John Thomas de Burgh in Galway under an order dated 25 September 1793.<sup>7</sup> The regiment went on to serve in the British Army until 1922 when they were disbanded along with five other Irish regiments from the newly formed Irish Free State.<sup>8</sup> Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century operations saw the Connaughts serve throughout the British Empire in Canada, the West Indies, Egypt, the Crimea, Zululand, South Africa and India. During the Peninsular campaign of the Napoleonic Wars, they gained considerable military respect within the British Army. Earning a reputation as fierce hand-to-hand combatants, they became synonymous as tough fighters (their motto was *Quis Separabit*) and were reputedly nicknamed *The Devil's Own* by the Duke of Wellington himself.<sup>9</sup> The Great War saw the Rangers continue a strong military heritage in Europe and the Middle East.<sup>10</sup>

On the formation of the Connaughts in 1793, various local regiments of militia from across the province joined the regiment, including the Galway Regiment, the Roscommon Regiment, South Mayo Rifles, and North Mayo Fusiliers. Seen in Figure 3.2, the recruiting area of the new regiment was the entire province of Connaught, the only provincial-wide Irish regiment in the British Army. The map also reveals the various regional geographies of regimental recruiting areas elsewhere in the country, with respective depots typically located centrally within clusters of counties. In all of these towns and regions, an established regimental heritage, with long-standing local connections and family associations, existed by the time of the disbandment of the southern Irish regiments in 1922.



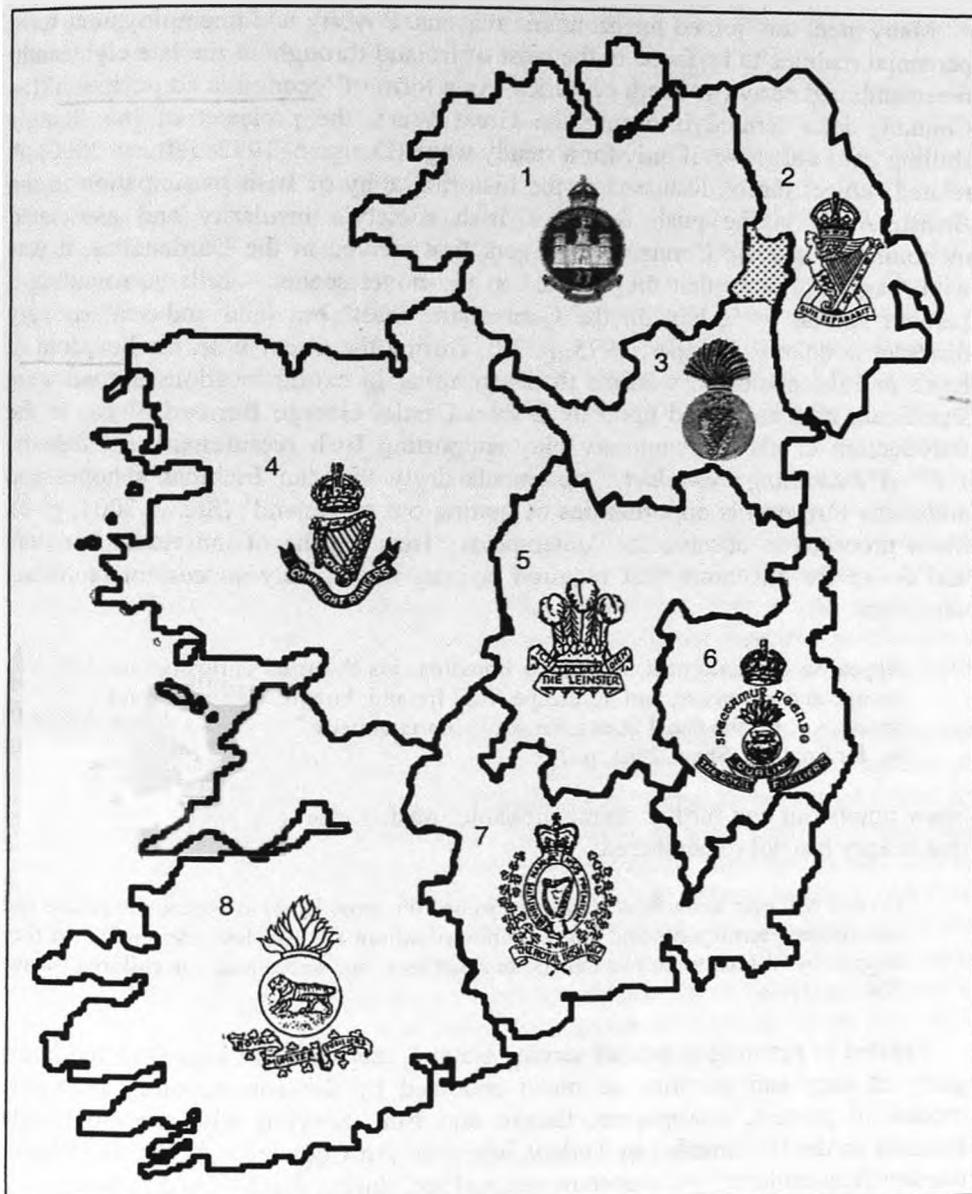
**Figure 3.1 'Listed for the Connaught Rangers' (1878) by Lady Butler**

Source: Bury Art Gallery and Museum

Men from across Connaught joined the Rangers for a variety of reasons. As elsewhere, motives inspiring enlistment for both Catholics and Protestants were 'clearly mixed' (Denman, 1992, p. 180). For many, joining was predicated on political, patriotic and even moral grounds, particularly during the Great War and the initial nationalist push of the Irish Parliamentary Party under John Redmond (Denman, 1992, 1995; Dungan, 1997).<sup>11</sup> As Denman (1992, p. 16) reminds us, this is frequently not remembered:

The fate of tens of thousands of patriotic Irishmen who, in response to the granting of home rule, chose to follow a different path to Irish nationhood by volunteering to serve with the British armed forces rarely attracts more than a passing reference, and that often pejorative.

In addition to the political support of Redmond and other prominent Irish nationalists such as Thomas Kettle, for example, the British Army recruitment authorities likened the Irish situation to Belgium and the cause of small nations (Denman, 1992; Jeffery, 2000). Images of marauding 'Huns', burning down houses and bayoneting women and children, were used particularly effectively in the initial poster recruitment campaign in the latter half of 1914 to rouse 'Irishmen' to 'remember Belgium' (Tierney, *et. al.*, 1986; Wollaeger, 1993; Wollaeger, 1999; Shaw, 2001). It is important to remember, then, that there was a 'widely accepted moral justification for going to war' and, as Jeffery reminds us, like the Australians, the Irish *volunteered* for duty and, therefore, we should 'not underestimate the rationality of their decision to enlist' (Jeffery, 2000, pp. 9-10).



- |    |                                     |   |
|----|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1. | <i>Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers</i> | (Counties Donegal, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone. Depot: Omagh)   |
| 2. | <i>Royal Irish Rifles</i>           | (Counties Antrim and Down. Depot: Belfast)                            |
| 3. | <i>Royal Irish Fusiliers</i>        | (Counties Armagh, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth. Depot: Armagh)           |
| 4. | <i>Connaught Rangers</i>            | (Province of Connaught. Depot: Galway)                                |
| 5. | <i>Leinster Regiment</i>            | (Counties Laois, Offaly, Longford, Meath and Westmeath. Depot: Birr)  |
| 6. | <i>Royal Dublin Fusiliers</i>       | (Counties Dublin, Kildare, Wicklow and Carlow. Depot: Naas)           |
| 7. | <i>Royal Irish Regiment</i>         | (Counties Tipperary, Waterford, Kilkenny and Wexford. Depot: Clonmel) |
| 8. | <i>Royal Munster Fusiliers</i>      | (Counties Cork, Kerry, Limerick and Clare. Depot: Tralee)             |

**Figure 3.2 Recruiting regions of Irish infantry regiments in the British Army until 1922**

Many men, too, joined for economic reasons. Poverty and unemployment were perennial realities to be faced in the west of Ireland throughout the late eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As a form of 'economic conscription' (as Connolly later termed it during the Great War), the prospect of the 'King's shilling' was attractive, if only for a steady wage (Denman, 1992; Jeffery, 2000). A related subject rarely discussed in the historiography of Irish participation in the British Army is the push factor of Irish society's insularity and associated monotony. When the Connaught Rangers first arrived in the Dardanelles, it was with 'eager curiosity that they looked at the novel scene' – hills surrounding a harbour similar to 'a bay on the Connemara coast' but land and sea 'so very different in colour' (Cooper, 1993, p. 38). During the Great War, the boredom of home and the perceived wartime thrills awaiting in exotic locations abroad were significant notions played upon by Dublin Castle. George Bernard Shaw, in the introduction to his contemporary play supporting Irish recruitment, *O'Flaherty, V.C.: A Recruiting Pamphlet*,<sup>12</sup> comments dryly that 'an Irishman's hopes and ambitions turn on his opportunities of getting out of Ireland' (Shaw, 2001, p. 2). Shaw proceeds to observe the contemporary Irish psyche of individual boredom and desire for adventure that required tapping into in any successful recruiting campaign:

Appeal to his discontent, his deadly boredom, his thwarted curiosity and desire for change and adventure, and, to escape from Ireland, he will go abroad to risk his life for France, for the Papal States, for secession in America, and even, if no better may be, for England (Shaw, 2001, p. 3).

Shaw points out one further 'unmentionable' push factor of 'voluntary enlistment' that history has not remembered:

No one will ever know how many men joined the army [just] to escape the tyrants and taskmasters, termagants and shrews, none of whom are any less irksome when they happen by ill-luck to be our fathers, our mothers, our wives and our children (Shaw, 2001, p. 3).

Related to patriotic senses of serving Ireland, recruits were also attracted to the glory of duty and sacrifice so much endorsed by the contemporary recruiting medias of posters, newspapers, theatre and film. Serving with the Connaught Rangers in the Dardanelles in Turkey, Major Bryan Cooper wrote dramatically of the sacrifices endured, yet somehow rationalised, during that ill-fated campaign:

The faces of dead comrades, lying at their sides, stiffened and grew rigid...from the ridge in front came the groans of the wounded, whom it was impossible to succour...It is no new thing for the sons of Ireland to perish in a forlorn hope and a fruitless struggle; they go forth to battle only to fall, yet there springs from their graves a glorious memory for the example of future generations (Cooper, 1993, pp. 100, 102).

As Jeffery (2000, p. 43) observes, Cooper's comprehension of the death and sacrifice of the 'sons of Ireland' in 'foreign fields' resonates strongly with

contemporary nationalist reasonings of blood sacrifice 'at home' espoused by the leaders of the 1916 Rising – mindsets perhaps not so far apart.

Romanticism, exoticism and fantasy were also significant notions inducing Irish enlistment in the British Army. Both Denman (1992) and Regan (2001) note how military spectacle were sources of fascination both before and after the War of Independence. Contemporary observations record how the 'presence of soldiers in all parts of the country', the 'sight of uniforms' and the 'pomp of military life' all 'touched the popular imagination'.<sup>13</sup> As Denman (1992, p. 36) observes, Sinn Féin were alarmed by this and complained that the traditional courage of the Irishman – who longed to show his 'inherent valour' on the battlefield – was being exploited.<sup>14</sup> In Bourke's examination of *An Intimate History of Killing*, she initially explores the superficial pleasures of war and impact of combat literature on the minds of men rushing to the front. Citing the memoirs of Lieutenant-Colonel H.F.N. Jourdain of the Connaught Rangers (who later wrote the history of the regiment after its disbandment), she draws our attention to the influence of war stories by writers like Charles Lever and Sir Walter Scott. Their tales prompted Jourdain to 'join the army' and take his part in 'stirring times' where combat involved 'charges, wild cheers which "rent the skies" and wholesale bayoneting until the enemy scattered and the Rangers "halted to recover breath and stayed the slaughter"' (Bourke, 1999, p. 8). There was, of course, one slaughter to take place at Gallipoli that would never have been envisaged by men like Jourdain – the futile slaughter of his own men.

Despite the sheer military folly and failure of the Dardanelles expedition and the monstrous casualties sustained in infantry charges no longer capable of breaking through defensive lines, Gallipoli would come to be remembered by many on the Allied side, particularly the Australians, as nevertheless a crucial site of collective sacrifice, public memory and national myth. The beaches and hills of this 'truly melancholy place' at Suvla and Sedd el Bahr, where so many lost their lives – Turkish, British and Anzac alike – also witnessed hundreds of young Irishmen shot dead, wounded or drowned (Myers, 2002, p. 13). The Irish are a part of this altar of mankind's madness but their sacrifice holds an additional sorrow in that 'of all the amnesiac aspects of Ireland's engagement with the Great War' their story is the 'most profoundly forgotten' (Jeffery, 2000, p. 38).

### **Meridians of Irish Nationalism: The Great War and 1916**

Irish enlistment in the British Army during the Great War was motivated by a diversity of factors, as outlined above, and it is important to recognise this complexity and return individual agency to those who fought and died. Nationalist sentiment was undoubtedly not the only reason for enlisting. That said, however, when reading Irish nationalism in the early twentieth century, a crucial perspective so often forgotten is that thousands of Irishmen heeded their nationalist political leaders and joined up to fight for the promise of Home Rule. These volunteers were, in effect, expressing a more cosmopolitan form of Irish nationalism. As Irish war poet and nationalist, Francis Ledwidge, commented on joining up, 'I joined the

British Army because she stood between Ireland and an enemy common to our civilisation and I would not have her say that she defended us while we did nothing'.<sup>15</sup> Securing the prospect of a free Irish nation was foremost in the minds of many of Ledwidge's compatriots. Hopes for an independent Ireland are prominent in the contemporary writings of, for example, Thomas Kettle, war poet and former Nationalist MP, and Willie Redmond, Nationalist MP and younger brother of John (Jeffery, 2000). As Myers consistently observes in his 'Irishman's Diary' in the *Irish Times*, not only were Irish sacrifices in the Great War later forgotten, but they are commonly not understood because each generation since have 'never been taught the greater historical truth that Irishmen, heeding the advice of their political leaders, had served in huge numbers' (Myers, 2002, p. 13).

When Pádraig Pearse proclaimed the Irish Republic on the portico of the GPO in Dublin in April 1916, he referred to the 'gallant allies in Europe' who were 'supporting' Ireland in its struggle against Britain, and signalled another path to Irish freedom that began at home (Denman, 1992, p. 129). He simultaneously, however, 'cruelly swept aside the thousands of Irishmen, as convinced patriots in their own way as Pearse and his followers, who had been fighting those "allies" for the past year and a half' (Denman, 1992, p. 129). A few months after the Rising, prior to being killed on the Somme, Thomas Kettle wrote of the other meridian of Irish nationalism: 'In the name, and by the seal, of the blood given in the last two years, I ask for colonial home rule for Ireland'.<sup>16</sup> Unsurprisingly, many nationalists fighting in the British Army abroad felt bitterly betrayed by the rebellion at home – their sacrifices effectively undermined. Captain Stephen Gwynn, a Nationalist MP and serving with the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Connaught Rangers in France during the rebellion, reflected after the war that he and his men 'felt they had been stabbed in the back' (Gwynn, 1919, p. 230).

The 1916 Rising and its after-effects would subsequently bring about 'the alienation of Ireland from the war and from its sons at the front' (Denman, 1992, p. 179). The Rising should not, however, be viewed in isolation as there were other factors at work in precipitating Irish disaffection from the war effort.<sup>17</sup> Support for the war diminished throughout Britain and the Empire in the latter years of the conflict as losses mounted, and Ireland was no different.<sup>18</sup> An additional factor in the Irish context was the presence throughout the war of a highly organised political group in Sinn Féin, whose actions were consistently subversive to the government. Sinn Féin's 'advanced nationalism' contested for the public's support of the war by stressing a number of issues, including most importantly the huge Irish losses incurred for no 'Irish' gain and the notion that the Great War was an imperial war that Ireland should have no part in (Novick, 1999, 2001). Irishmen, it was argued, should fight and die at home, as popularly celebrated in the Irish ballad 'The Foggy Dew', written in 1919:

'Twas better to die 'neath an Irish sky  
Than at Suvla or Sedd el Bahr.

In the aftermath of 1916, southern Irish troops in the field were not only faced with the pressure of being alienated at home, they were also victims of alienation

and propaganda within the British Army. In the latter years of the war, there was 'widespread suspicion of southern Irish troops among certain sections of the military high command' (Denman, 1992, p. 181). This suspicion added to the extent of Othering of Irish troops arguably pre-existing in the British military. Father McCrory, chaplain of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Connaught Rangers in France during the war, for example, believed that general anti-Irish sentiments were already present in the army prior to 1916.<sup>19</sup> Some nationalists evidently did feel sympathy for the rebellion. Francis Ledwidge, for example, in his elegy to Thomas MacDonagh, expressed simultaneously how 'agonising [it was] for him to admit that he wore the same uniform as the men who shot MacDonagh and his comrades' (Boyd, 2003). However, as Bowman (2003) asserts in his recent examination of discipline and morale in the Irish regiments in the Great War, there is little evidence to suggest that there was any troop support for Sinn Féin or the rebellion. He notes that, despite this, 'post 1916 events in Ireland appear to have soured attitudes to Irish soldiers' within the British military (Bowman, 2003, p. 205). One of the reasons for this appears to be a smear offensive against Irish units, such as the 'black propaganda campaign surrounding the retreat of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division in March 1918' (Bowman, 2003, p. 205). Despite the propaganda, regimental loyalty of Irish troops nevertheless held firm and was trusted by their commanding officers. When Lieutenant-Colonel Rowland Feilding took command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Connaught Rangers a few months after the 1916 Rising, for example, he 'heard much frank discussion' on 'political events', but observed that 'it made no difference to the loyalty and devotion of his troops at the front, which he never seems to have doubted' (Denman, 1992, p. 144). With due credit to the Irish troops in the field who depended on each other as they continued to be put into the line, even if the 1916 Rising affected them greatly, and despite the fact that it had precipitated alienation from both home and within the army, it did not, as Denman (1992, p. 144) observes, damage their 'fighting performance'.<sup>20</sup>

One of the Easter Rising's most important effects (and one rarely acknowledged or appreciated) is the manner in which its iconographic prioritisation in Irish history and heritage has served to simultaneously discredit and marginalise the narrative of thousands of patriotic Irishmen who took another pathway to Irish independence. At home on leave during the rebellion, Thomas Kettle was 'distressed by the executions, for he was a friend of several of those shot' (Denman, 1992, p. 145). He remarked despondently, however, that the Rising had 'spoiled it all – spoiled his dream of a free united Ireland in a free Europe'.<sup>21</sup> The leaders of the Rising, he commented, 'will go down in history as heroes and martyrs; and I will go down – if I go down at all – as a bloody British officer'.<sup>22</sup> Kettle not only expressed the ambiguity and impossibility of his own position, but also pointed prophetically to the fundamental tension of remembering conflicting narratives in post-independent Ireland. That tension resulted in his more problematic narrative of Irish nationalism being marginalised to the point of effective erasure, and through its erasure was lost a heritage of thousands of Irishmen.

**'Nor Did We Lack "The Green": Expressions of Another Irishness**

Remembering his time served with the 5<sup>th</sup> Connaught Rangers in the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division in Gallipoli, Major Bryan Cooper commented frequently on the resolve of the troops that 'Ireland should not be ashamed of [them]' (Cooper, 1993, p. 35). He observes their efforts to emblazon their uniforms with 'shamrock badges', much like the Munster Fusiliers who 'went into action with a green shamrock on each arm just below the shoulder' (Cooper, 1993, p. 49). The 6<sup>th</sup> Connaught Rangers, too, serving with the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division in France, 'made an enormous green flag with a yellow Irish harp on it', which 'they took on marches and flew outside their billets' (Denman, 1992, p. 144).<sup>23</sup> In recalling the experiences of the Rangers in Gallipoli, Cooper recorded the pride of both officers and enlisted men in singing songs such as 'Brian Boru's March' and 'God Save Ireland', and points to another Irishness celebrated far from home:

Nor did we lack "the green". One unit sewed shamrocks on to its sleeves, another wore them as helmet badges. Almost every company cherished somewhere an entirely unofficial green flag, as dear to the men as if they were the regimental colours themselves. These constituted an outward and visible sign that the honour of Ireland was in the Division's keeping and the men did not forget it (Cooper, 1993, p. 135).

Such cultural signifiers of Irish identity occurred within an overarching framework of the diverse heritages of the British Army, and have both a contemporary and modern parallel with the Irish diaspora's celebration of Irish heritage abroad in a multicultural context.

It is perhaps useful at this point to consider the scale of that 'other Irishness', concentrating solely on World War I. Since the Great War, the collective figure of Irish enlistment has been compiled and contested by a number of authors, with estimates ranging from 100,000 to 500,000 – the uncertainty owing partially to political reasons but more significantly to the difficulties of recording Irish emigrants who enlisted abroad.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, in recent years, a figure of approximately 210,000 has come to be reliably accepted as representing all Irish male enlistment at home, though the figure is likely to be considerably higher as it 'does not include natives of Ireland who joined units in Britain, the empire or the USA' (Jeffery, 2000, p. 6). The 49,435 Irish dead recorded in the eight volumes of *Ireland's Memorial Records* has also been revised to between 25,000 and 35,000.<sup>25</sup> These figures exclude those not born in Ireland, despite many being likely part of the Irish diaspora. Without detailed investigation of all 49,435 entries, and given that this figure does not, in any case, account for the thousands of Irishmen killed in action who were born in Ireland but enlisted in units in Australia, Canada, USA and elsewhere,<sup>26</sup> we 'continue to speculate' (Jeffery, 2000, p. 35). It is important to not get lost in mere statistics, however. The sheer scale of Irish loss is both unquestionable and overwhelming. It brings into sharp relief the import of these Irishmen's multiple stories/narratives to constructs of Irish heritage and identity, and indicates conversely the extent to which their heritages have neither been incorporated nor recognised.

As part of Ireland's Great War recruitment effort, the Connaught Rangers raised an additional four battalions (one battalion consisted of approximately 1,000 men) to add to its existing two regular battalions, and served in Western and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, North Africa and the Subcontinent.<sup>27</sup> Just short of 2,000 of the Rangers died, of which 1,871 were enlisted men (*Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914-1919* Digital Database (hereafter *SDGW*)).<sup>28</sup> Of these, approximately 1,400 were born in Ireland, mostly in Connaught, but also in the major cities and towns of Dublin, Belfast, Cork and Limerick (*SDGW*).<sup>29</sup> The dead Rangers came from across the province – from Clifden to Sligo, from Roscommon to Ballina – with each region connected in loss (*SDGW*).<sup>30</sup> In the broader context, as many as 755 men from County Galway alone are estimated to have died in the Connaught Rangers and other British armed forces during the war.<sup>31</sup> Their stories are no less tragic because they were eclipsed by later events and forgotten, and many point to the contribution and loss of so many families. One notable story, covered by the *Galway Express* in 1915 and explored recently by Whitmarsh (2003), is the contribution of over 250 men from The Claddagh in Galway city to the Royal Navy during the war. Citizens throughout Galway had also donated an ambulance to the 1<sup>st</sup> Connaught Rangers in 1915.<sup>32</sup> These, and many more individual, less exceptional, stories all inform our understanding of key moments largely forgotten from Ireland's past.

### **Place for Another Heritage?**

The heritage of southern Ireland's role in the Great War equates to what Denman (1992, p. 16) terms a 'historical no man's land'. As Jeffery (1992, p. 7) observes, this 'dangerous zone sits between two opposing perceptions' of Irish involvement in the Great War:

on the one side is the unionist image of Irish Protestants loyally, and exclusively, rallying to the flag [and] sealing the Union with blood...On the other, Catholic and nationalist, side, the men of the [1916] Rising represent the "real" and true Ireland, in sharp contrast to the misguided [Irishmen] slaughtered in France at the altar of British imperialism.

Between these polarised and essentialised narratives 'lies a more complex and human reality' that represents the multiple 'paradoxes that surrounded Irish involvement in the Great War' (Jeffery, 1992, p. 7; Denman, 1992, p. 17). When Pól Ó Muirí, poet and writer from nationalist Belfast, recently visited the Somme to find the grave of his great-uncle from the Donegal Gaeltacht, he signalled a way of steering clear of the two 'opposing narratives' – 'green and orange' – of the 'history of the first World War in Ireland'. Ó Muirí points to the in-between space of Irish heritage, hidden but not perhaps lost: 'I found myself being part of a third narrative, a personal quieter one that simply sought to honour my own flesh and blood'.<sup>33</sup>

In the *Connemara Heritage and History Centre* in Lettershea near Clifden, there is no mention of the 'heritage' and 'history' of the Connaught Rangers.<sup>34</sup> Their stories/experiences are not even present for interrogation. The possibility of reading the very tensions and complexities of this other history that can inform so significantly our understanding of both its moment in the past and its heritage in the present is effectively disallowed. Is it not time that these conflicting narratives of Irish history be open to interrogation by a more popular audience and engaged at such sites where 'most public history is now both produced and consumed' (Officer, 1995, p. 38)? As Montague (1989, p. 40) argued so expressively more than a decade ago:

Let us declare an end to all narrowness, in our thoughts at least. [We] should be able to accept, or listen to, the many voices, agreeable and disturbing, which haunt our land. "The isle is full of noises", but they should be made to blend, as a symphony contains its dissonances, structures of healing.

In examining the 'dissonances of representation' in *The Somme Heritage Centre* near Newtownards, County Down (opened in 1994), Officer (1995, p. 42) documents the political tensions involved in depicting the participation of the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division at the Somme in 'such a way as not to exclude the part played by Irish nationalists in the Allied armies'. He proceeds to point out that to 'recognise this tension at work is not to invalidate the project or suggest that the aspirations which it jointly pursues are simply incompatible' (Officer, 1995, p. 42). Kidd (1997) discusses the same challenges of remembering the Great War in different ways in Lorraine to reflect its position on the French-German border. Recognising that 'Ireland's children lie buried on the Somme as well as in Kilmainham' is the first stage of what Montague (1989, pp. 40-41) believes is 'an inclusiveness towards which we might all aspire'.

As Lembcke argues, 'memory is a narrative rather than a replica of an experience that can be retrieved' (Lembcke, 1998, p. 187). In attempting to remember the diverse experiences of the Irish past, we are reminded of another narrative in the Connaught Rangers that points to another heritage. The social, economic and political complexities of why individuals fought in Irish regiments in the British Army are little understood in modern Ireland, largely because their stories are not open to interrogation. These hidden stories disturb the simplified narratives of Irish history that are prioritised for consumption in the tourism and heritage industries in modern Ireland, and more generally in popular culture. Largely absent too from primary and secondary education, these more complex histories and more fluid cultural geographies are minimally incorporated into accounts of the Irish past. This in turn renders their (re)presentation in the modern context a difficult task that involves an attempt to disrupt homogenous senses of remembering 'the' Irish experience.

## Conclusion

In just over a week's fighting on the Somme in September 1916, the 6th Connaught Rangers lost 23 officers and 407 enlisted men (Denman, 1992, p. 101). Towards the end of the Great War in March 1918, the same battalion, with its numbers replenished, was 'practically annihilated' during the German breakthrough at St. Emilie in France.<sup>35</sup> In one week, the battalion lost '22 officers and 618 other ranks' (Jourdain and Fraser, 1999, Vol. 3, p. 273). These Irish voices, when heard, reveal a different heritage, comprising a less straightforward Irish relationship with Britain and one that adds a necessarily complex layer to the multiple 'heritages' of Ireland and indeed Irish nationalism. This chapter has been concerned with narrating some of those stories and (re)presenting their Irish heritage and its complex interconnections with Britain and beyond. It forms part of what Allen recently observes as the reintroduction of 'a number of fundamental moments to their pivotal place in Irish culture' (Allen, 2003, p. 15).<sup>36</sup>

In Lembcke's compelling exploration of remembering the Vietnam War, he reminds us that 'the power to control memory' is 'bound up with the power to control representations of history' (Lembcke, 1998, p. 187). The possibility of remembering the past differently, then, is always present, even if that path was not taken previously for political and other reasons. The Connaught Rangers, as an Irish regiment in the British Army, encapsulate the fundamental ambiguity of Ireland's relationship with Britain and the diversity of experience writ large in Ireland's past that is often neither celebrated nor indeed recognised. Their lost voices point to another Irish heritage that disrupts hegemonic metanarratives of Irish history and suggests a means of celebrating multivocal Irishness through multiple memories. The complexities and tensions of this other Irish experience inform our reading of both the Irish past and representations of that past in the heritage of the present.

## Notes

1. My thanks to Neval Berber, Nessa Cronin and Ulf Strohmayer for their comments. Thanks, too, to Siubhán Comer for her work on the Irish regiments map, and to Bury Art Gallery and Museum for permission to reproduce an image of 'Listed for the Connaught Rangers'.
2. Quoted from Major Cooper's own divisional history, *The 10th (Irish) Division in Gallipoli*, first published in 1918 (Cooper, 1993, p. 139).
3. The recent controversy over the *Fame of Tipperary Group's* endeavours to remember all Irish men and women who served in conflicts at home and abroad – including those who served in the British Army – is a case in point. See commentary on some hostile reaction to the group's activities on their website 'The Irish in Uniform' at [http://homepage.tinet.ie/~tipperaryfame/the\\_fotg.htm](http://homepage.tinet.ie/~tipperaryfame/the_fotg.htm) (accessed 2 March 2004).
4. For further commentary, see Denman (1992, pp. 42-8). The 1916 Rising and War of Independence ensured additional prejudice against, and suspicion of, Irish units within the British military prior to the emergence of the Irish Free State. This was exemplified by the propaganda campaign against the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) division in France towards the end of

- the Great War and the later Connaught Rangers mutiny in India in 1920 (Babington, 1991; Denman, 1992; Bowman, 2003).
5. I explore this notion in detail in Chapter 1 of Morrissey (2003).
  6. The art work, dating to 1878, was actually painted by Lady Butler whilst holidaying in County Kerry. Now hanging in Bury Art Gallery and Museum, Lancashire, it depicts two men being recruited into the 88<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot of the Rangers (later to become the 1<sup>st</sup> (Regular) Battalion, Connaught Rangers, in 1881). The 94<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot of the Connaught Rangers (established in 1823) became the 2<sup>nd</sup> (Regular) Battalion, Connaught Rangers also in 1881. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion depot was in Galway, while the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion depot was in Armagh. For further detail, see Jourdain and Fraser (1999, Vol. II, pp. 371-2).
  7. The order to raise an infantry regiment in the West of Ireland came in the aftermath of the outbreak in February 1793 of war between Britain and France (sparked off by the ongoing French Revolution). See Jourdain and Fraser (1999, Vol. I, p. 1).
  8. Also disbanded in 1922 were four other infantry regiments (Royal Munster Fusiliers, Royal Dublin Fusiliers, Prince of Wales Leinster Regiment and Royal Irish Regiment) and one cavalry regiment (South Irish Horse).
  9. *The Devil's Own* is now a popular Napoleonic battle re-enactment group, based in Sligo and Farnham, Surrey; ([www.devils-own.co.uk](http://www.devils-own.co.uk), Accessed 2 March 2004).
  10. The Rangers are mentioned commendably, for example, in Clark's *The Donkeys* on a number of occasions. See also Denman (1992, pp. 80-81).
  11. For a cogent discussion of the diverse reasons for Irish volunteering during the Great War, see chapter one of Jeffery (2000).
  12. The play was first performed on the Western front at Treizeenes in Belgium in 1917 and later in England in 1920. Shaw himself attended a dress rehearsal of the first performance while on an official visit to the Western Front. Originally subtitled 'An Interlude in the Great War', it was later changed to 'A Reminiscence of 1915 (A Recruiting Pamphlet)' on publication by Constable in London in 1919 in the collection of plays *Heartbreak House, Great Catherine, and Playlets of the War*.
  13. Quoted in Denman (1992, p. 36).
  14. See also Novick (1999).
  15. Quoted in Boyd (2003, p. 17).
  16. *Freeman's Journal*, 23 October 1916. This is quoted from a letter written just before he fell on the Somme on 9 September 1916, and subsequently published – along with a moving poem to his daughter – in the *Freeman's Journal* six weeks after his death.
  17. In considering declining Irish support for the war, the impact of the Easter Rising can sometimes be overstated. It is perhaps best to see the rebellion as *accelerating* the nationalist Irish push for disaffection from Britain, rather than solely defining it.
  18. The Australian public, for example, defeated its national conscription bill for a second time in 1917 with a greater majority than a year previously in 1916.
  19. Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, MS. D.1868/1, First World War Diary of Father McCrory, p. 34.
  20. The loyalty of the Connaught Rangers and other Irish regiments was also strained by frequent officering incompetence, for which there is ample evidence. For the Rangers, see, for example, Bowman (2003, pp. 49-50, 108, 150-52, 191, 197).
  21. Quoted in Jeffery (2000, p. 61).
  22. Quoted in Denman (1992, p. 145).
  23. A distinctive expression of the Rangers' regional Irish identity within the British Army was their renowned high-pitched 'Connaught yell' on going into battle (Johnstone, 1992, p. 97).
  24. For wider discussion, see Jeffery (2000, pp. 5-6).

25. Casey (1997) suggests 35,000, while Fitzpatrick (1996) reduces the number further to 25,000.
26. Casey (1997) adds an estimated 5,000 to the numbers of Irish dead to allow for those who enlisted outside the UK.
27. All six battalions were the 1<sup>st</sup> (Regular) Battalion; 2<sup>nd</sup> (Regular) Battalion (amalgamated with 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion in December 1914); 3<sup>rd</sup> (Reserve) Battalion; 4<sup>th</sup> (Reserve) Battalion; 5<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion; and 6<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion.
28. The exact figure is 1,998 – 127 officers and 1,871 enlisted men.
29. The *SDGW* database as a source is not without its shortcomings – for example, place of birth and enlistment are not always recorded. The figure of 1,400 has been calculated carefully but is approximate.
30. Many of the dead also hailed from towns neighbouring the province, such as Athlone in County Westmeath and Nenagh in County Tipperary (*SDGW*).
31. Whitmarsh (2003), cited in *Galway Independent*, 3 December 2003.
32. Public Record Office, Kew, MS. WO95/3923, First World War Diary of the 1<sup>st</sup> Connaught Rangers, 19 March 1915.
33. Ó Múiri (2003, p. 13).
34. When questioned recently, this award-winning heritage centre was, in fact, unaware of the regiment's existence.
35. For further detail, see Jourdain and Fraser (1999, Vol. III, pp. 261-73).
36. Allen mentions the First World War, Russian Revolution and the development of industry and technology at home as key influences on Irish modernity that are 'peripheral to many analyses'. Jeffery (2000, p. 2) sees the Great War as 'the single most central experience of twentieth-century Ireland'.

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