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Irish Junkers? The Irish Landed Class and the British Army in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

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ABSTRACT
The Irish landed class from the eighteenth century onwards was one of the British Army's main sources of officers; and as a national/regional elite with military service central to their sense of identity they have been compared to the Prussian Junker class. Their political relationship with the British government was, however, complex and occasionally confrontational. This article examines the extent of their military involvement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, compares this with their counterparts in Britain, and suggests some parallels between their experience and that of regional landed elites in the Prussian Army in the late eighteenth century.

2022 was not only the centenary of the disbandment of the southern Irish regiments of the British Army, it also marked 52 years since Correlli Barnett, in his still valuable book, *Britain and her Army*, famously described the Anglo-Irish gentry as 'the closest thing Britain ever possessed to the Prussian Junker class'.[1] That view struck some scholars, at the time and subsequently, as arresting, thought-provoking and wrong, or

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[1]Correlli Barnett, *Britain and Her Army, 1509–1970: A Military, Political and Social Survey*, (London: Allen Lane, 1970), pp. 314–315.

at the least a significant exaggeration.[2] Certainly, Irish landed officers never dominated the British officer corps numerically in the way the Brandenburg and east-Elbian gentry did the pre-1871 Prussian Army.[3] But here, of course, Barnett was not talking about absolute numbers: he was discussing a distinctive national/regional elite, over-represented in the army's officer corps and for whom military service was a central part of their collective identity. In that sense the comparison does have validity, and had he included the Scottish gentry alongside the Irish the parallels would be even closer. Furthermore, in his reference to the Junkers, he reminded us that the Irish landed class, as a regional military elite, were not simply a British but were also a European phenomenon. This article offers, therefore, both a high-level overview of the Irish gentry's military involvement from the mid-eighteenth century to the start of the twentieth, and some preliminary statistical comparisons with their counterparts in Great Britain and Prussia.

The statistics deployed here come from a set of databases created by tracking the military involvement (or, in some cases, non-involvement) of 200 randomly-selected Irish landed families – the 'Database Families' – drawn from all 32 Irish counties.[4] In terms of definitions, 'Irish' means families who owned Irish estates in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, whose Irish property was the largest element of their landholdings and who were permanently resident in Ireland for at least part of this

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[2]Ian Beckett, ed., *The Army and the Curragh Incident, 1914*, (London: Bodley Head, 1986), p. 3; Elizabeth A Muenger, *The British Military Dilemma in Ireland: Occupation Politics, 1886-1914,* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1991), pp. 18-19.

[3]Carmen Winkel, '"Getreue wie goldt" oder "malicious wie der deuffel"?', in Lorenz Friedrich Beck & Frank Göse, *Brandenburg und seine Landschaften: Zentrum und Region vom Spätmittelalter bis 1800,* (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2009), pp. 199-219; Christopher Duffy, *The Army of Frederick the Great*, 2nd edn., (Chicago: Emperor's Press, 1996), pp. 39-47 & pp. 51-53; Daniel J Hughes, *The King's Finest: A Social and Bureaucratic Profile of Prussia's General Officers, 1871-1914,* (New York: Praeger, 1987), pp. 3-4 & pp. 24-38.

[4]Randomly selected, in that families were not chosen because they had military connections. A practical factor, however, was the availability of sufficiently detailed genealogical information in standard sources, for example, *Burke's Peerage/Landed Gentry*, *Cokayne's Complete Peerage* etc., to allow a reliable reconstruction of a family's structure over successive generations through the male line. The families include 174 who owned Irish estates in 1775, 14 who acquired them between 1775-1799, & 12 who obtained estates in 1800-15: the changing composition allows for the replacement of families dying out/relocating and the inclusion of 17 Catholic families (9%) who became eligible to hold regular British commissions, albeit with constraints, from 1793.

period.[5] 'Landed' means estates of at least 1,000 acres.[6] And 'families' means the landowners themselves at any given point and their immediate male relatives: fathers, uncles, brothers and sons.[7] For convenience the terms 'landed class' and 'gentry' are used interchangeably, so gentry here includes titled as well as untitled families. Finally, military commissions refer to those in regular regiments and wartime units raised for general service; auxiliary formations like the militia and the yeomanry, which were also an important component of the Irish gentry's military identity, are not covered.[8]

In the 200 Database Families, 3,026 males have so far been identified who were born between January 1700 and December 1899 and who survived to adulthood. Of these, 1,141, or 38%, received regular or wartime commissions in the army (including the East India Company's service) and navy between, roughly, the 1720s and the 1920s. Table 1 shows the percentage of those born in each quartile who secured commissions. As can be seen, their participation levels start rising from the mid-eighteenth century and continue upwards, other than a dip early in the nineteenth century connected to army downsizing and the post-1815 economic depression; in the final quartile there is a sharp rise due largely, but not solely, to the pull factor of the Great War. These are minimum figures. The further back one goes, inevitably, the sketchier the available information becomes. Experience suggests that genealogical sources like *Burkes Peerage/Landed Gentry* are largely accurate for the nineteenth century but under-record military service by about 10% for the second half of the

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[5]So, under this definition the Dukes of Devonshire, despite their large Irish estates, do not qualify as Irish but the earls of Midleton, for a period in the eighteenth century resident in England, do.

[6]Estate sizes as in U.H. Hussey De Burgh, *The landowners of Ireland: an alphabetical list of the owners of estates of 500 acres or £500 valuation and upwards in Ireland, with the acreage and valuation in each county,* (Dublin: Hodges Figgis, 1878). No such list exists for the later-eighteenth century, but for the Database Families it can be assumed with reasonable confidence their landholdings were then of broadly comparable size. The nature of the sources means there is an inevitable bias towards wealthier families (that is, those in the 1870s with estates of over 3,000 acres/£3,000 pa valuation), but a particular effort has been made to ensure that one-third of the Database Families fall into the 1,000-3,000 acre range.

[7]Termed the 'core' family group; the research project also covers landowners' nephews and cousins, the 'extended' family group, not included here.

[8]For the Irish yeomanry and militia see Allan Blackstock, *An Ascendancy Army: The Irish Yeomanry 1796-1834,* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998); Sir Henry McAnally, *The Irish Militia 1793-1816: A Social and Military Study,* (London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1949); Ivan F. Nelson, *The Irish Militia 1793-1802: Ireland's Forgotten Army,* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007); William Butler, *The Irish Amateur Military Tradition in the British Army, 1854-1992,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

eighteenth century, not least for eldest sons (probably for reasons of space). Since, however, all 3,026 individuals have as far as possible been checked against army lists and other sources, the figures are, it is hoped, sufficiently accurate to establish reliable trajectories of military service over time.[9] Had commissions in auxiliary forces been included, the percentages would be markedly higher.

Birth quartile	Adult males	Regular/war-time commis-sions (% of all males)	Army (% of commis-sions)	HEIC/Indian Army (% of commis-sions)	Royal Navy (% of commis-sions)
1700-24	**326**	**45 (14%)**	39 (87%)	1 (2%)	5 (11%)
1725-49	**347**	**100 (29%)**	91 (91%)	1 (1%)	8 (8%)
1750-74	**466**	**170 (36%)**	146 (86%)	6 (4%)	18 (11%)
1775-99	**519**	**209 (40%)**	154 (74%)	12 (6%)	43 (21%)
1800-24	**471**	**163 (35%)**	136 (83%)	7 (4%)	20 (13%)
1825-49	**388**	**170 (44%)**	141 (83%)	7 (4%)	22 (13%)
1850-74	**336**	**157 (46%)**	140 (89%)	3 (2%)	14 (9%)
1875-99	**173**	**127 (73%)**	112 (88%)	3 (2%)	12 (10%)
Total	**3026**	**1141 (38%)**	959 (84%)	40 (4%)	142 (13%)

200 landed families, geographical distribution Leinster 63, Ulster 61, Munster 48, Connacht 28. Estate size/value (1870s): ≥ 3,000 acres/£3,000 pa valuation, 135 families (68%); 1000-3000 acres, £1000-2999 pa valuation, 65 families (32%). Denominational breakdown (early 1800s): Catholic 17 (9%), remainder Protestant. Source: Families Database, compiled from genealogical reference works (for example, *Burkes Peerage/Landed Gentry, Dictionary of National Biography, Dictionary of Irish Biography*), military reference works (annual Army Lists, Hart's Army Lists, Navy Lists*, Royal Military Calendar*), & archival sources.

Table 1: Military Participation Levels amongst Irish Landed Families (adult males born 1 Jan 1700-31 Dec 1899).

The trend shown in Table 1 reflects the Irish gentry's evolution: from a national/regional elite within the Hanoverian composite state in the later eighteenth century seeking access to state service; to one that, as a result of global war, insurrection and political change, had by 1815 become integrated, albeit precariously, into a broader 'British' ruling class; to be followed, as their domestic political and economic position declined, by an increased focus on military and imperial service that by the start of the twentieth century had given them some characteristics of a

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[9]Checking individuals, while still laborious, becomes easier with the introduction of indexes in the army lists from 1765 onwards.

professional military-imperial service class.[10] In particular, their position as landlords had eroded rapidly in the last third of the nineteenth century in the face of popular resistance and government action, and the 1903 Wyndham Land Act is here taken as marking the beginning of the end of Irish landlordism, though the process took some years more to work through.[11]

The breakdown of the 1,141 commissions by service demonstrates that the army (84%) was always the dominant choice. The 13% who joined the Royal Navy are, however, a reminder that there was also a strong naval tradition amongst the Irish landed class, prominent officers including Henry Blackwood, Richard Meade, Charles Beresford and David Beattie. A shift towards naval service in the early 1800s reflected not only the navy's expansion and growing prestige but also, it seems, some disruption to army patronage networks following the Union.[12] The figure of just 4% going to the East India Company/Indian Armies indicates that, despite significant Irish involvement in India, a career in the sub-continent was less popular amongst core members of these relatively wealthy landed families; their cousins and nephews, for example, were twice as likely to go into the Indian service.[13] Around 100 of these officers became brigadiers or higher, seven becoming field-marshals; more than 170 others reached the rank of colonel or lieutenant-colonel and there were nearly 30 rear-admirals and above, which indicates that for many families military service was a career, not a short-term rite of passage. 137 officers (12%) from these families died on operations; and numbers of others died on garrison duty around the world.

By way of comparison, 219 family members, or 7%, became clergymen of various denominations, although mostly Anglican. The church, therefore, was five times less popular than the armed forces. There was, however, a distinct change over time: of males born into these families in the second half of the eighteenth century, one in nine

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[10]For example, of 116 males born into these (core) families between 1870-1879, 55 received regular military commissions (52 army, 3 navy); 15 obtained wartime commissions in the Boer &/or Great Wars, 3 doing so from positions in the colonial bureaucracy; and at least 11 of the remaining 46 were either UK/colonial officials or had emigrated to the dominions. So, 81 (70%) had a military-imperial connection and there may have been others.

[11]On the decline of landlordism, see Paul Bew, *Land and the National Question in Ireland 1858-82*, (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1978); Philip Bull*, Land, Politics and Nationalism: A Study of the Irish Land Question,* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1996); Terence Dooley, *The Decline of the Big House in Ireland,* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 2001).

[12]The legislative Union between Great Britain and Ireland, which came into effect in January 1801.

[13]The percentage of nephews and cousins joining the Honourable East India Company's Service (HEICS) or Indian Army was just under 8% (Families Database)..

went into the church, while in the second half of the nineteenth century that figure plummeted to one in a hundred. This suggests either that the Holy Spirit was now moving less energetically amongst them or, more likely, that the fall reflected the availability of a wider range of careers, especially in imperial service, and the ending of private ownership of church livings.

So, this was a heavily militarised group. We tend to take that for granted. But perhaps we should not, because the Irish gentry's military service needs to be seen in the context of their changing political circumstances and their complex, and sometimes difficult, relationship with the British state. Two particular aspects are examined here: the origins of their military tradition in the eighteenth century, and some of the friction points that developed between them and the British government over the ensuing 150 years, and the impact, if any, this had on their desire for military service.

As Table 1 shows, the proportion of males from the Database Families entering the armed forces during the eighteenth century more than doubled between the first and third birth quartiles. For most Irish landed 'military' families, therefore, their continuous connection with the British Army dates to the second half of the eighteenth century. There were three main drivers for this. The first was greater opportunity. The British state was at war for 52 of the 77 years between 1739 and 1815, usually with France, and the size of the army's officer corps steadily increased in the course of the century.[14] In addition, from the late 1760s, following the Townshend viceroyalty, until 1800 military patronage played a key part in Dublin Castle's management of the Irish parliament, and the Irish landed elite took full advantage of the increased access to military service this offered.[15] The second reason was their

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[14]The number of regular officers rose from 2,100 in the early 1750s to nearly 4,600 during the Seven Years War, fell to 2,600 in 1770 & grew again to almost 4,100 in the American War of Independence: J. A. Houlding, *Fit for Service: The Training of the British Army, 1715-1795,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 99. For the impact of the eighteenth-century wars on Ireland and Britain, see Charles Ivar McGrath, *Ireland and Empire, 1692-1770,* (London: Routledge, 2012); Stephen Conway, *War, State, and Society in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); idem., *The British Isles and the War of American Independence,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); J.E. Cookson, *The British Armed Nation 1793-1815,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Thomas Bartlett, 'Ireland during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1791-1815', in James Kelly, ed., *The Cambridge History of Ireland, Vol III, 1730-1880,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Anthony Page, *Britain and the Seventy Years War, 1744-1815,* (London: Palgrave, 2015).
[15]Thomas Bartlett, 'The Augmentation of the Army in Ireland 1767-1769', *English Historical Review*, 96, 380 (July 1981), pp. 540-559; A.P.W Malcomson, *John Foster: The*

growing prosperity from mid-century onwards, as the traumas of the seventeenth century receded. That period of sustained economic growth, from roughly the 1740s to 1815 (despite the upheavals of the 1790s), helped fund military careers.[16] And the third factor was changing social attitudes as to what constituted appropriate occupations for gentlemen. In that regard, they had fewer alternative career options than their English counterparts, in terms of commercial and professional opportunities and the numbers of posts available in government and the church.[17]

In this process of militarisation they were part of a European-wide trend. Christopher Storrs and Hamish Scott have pointed out how, between 1600 and 1800, landed elites across Europe, whose traditional roles had seemed threatened by military modernisation, re-invented themselves as a military service class. As Storrs and Scott observed,

> [t]he two worlds of army officer and nobility were becoming ever more closely identified by the final decades of the eighteenth century…. their fusion may even have been becoming a defining feature of state and society at the end of the *ancien regime*.[18]

Politics of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 235-280.

[16]David Dickson, 'Society and Economy in the Long Eighteenth Century', in Kelly, *Cambridge History of Ireland, Vol. III*, pp. 153-165; L.M. Cullen, 'Economic development, 1750-1800', in T.W. Moody & W.E. Vaughan, eds, *A New History of Ireland, Vol. IV: Eighteenth-Century Ireland 1691-1800,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 171-180.

[17]On shifting attitudes to career choices see Rory Muir, *Gentlemen of Uncertain Fortune: How Younger Sons Made Their Way in Jane Austen's England*, (London: Yale, 2019), pp. 1-21 & pp. 194-282; Alan J Guy*, Oeconomy and Discipline: Officership and administration in the British army 1714-63,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp165-168; Stana Nenadic, 'The Impact of the Military Profession on Highland Gentry Families, c.1730 – 1830', *Scottish Historical Review*, 85, 219, Pt. I (Apr 2006), pp. 75-99; Toby Barnard, ''Almoners of Providence': the clergy, 1647 to c.1780', in T.C. Barnard & W.G. Neely, eds, *The Clergy of the Church of Ireland, 1000-2000,* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), pp. 78-105.

[18]Christopher Storrs & H.M. Scott, 'The Military Revolution and the European Nobility, c1600-1800', *War in History*, 3, 1 (1996), pp. 1-41, quotation at p. 39. See also Scott and Storrs, 'Introduction: The Consolidation of Noble Power in Europe, c1600-1800', in H.M. Scott, ed., *The European Nobilities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Volume One, Western Europe,* (London: Longman, 1995), pp. 1-52; Bernhard R Kroener, ''Des Königs Rock'': Das Offizierkorps in Frankreich, Österreich und Preussen im 18. Jahrhundert – Werkzeug sozialer Militarisierung oder Symbol gesellschaftlicher Integration?', in Peter Baumgart, Bernhard R. Kroener & Heinz Stübig, *Die Preussische*

But while the experience of the Irish landed class broadly aligns with these European-wide developments, they are not an exact fit for the Storrs/Scott model. Most Protestant landowners of eighteenth-century Ireland (Catholics being unable to hold regular British commissions until 1793) were not a centuries-old elite seeking new roles but were either the descendants of a kind of 'conquistador' class who had acquired lands through service in the Elizabethan, Cromwellian and Williamite forces, or were families whose success in other spheres enabled them subsequently to acquire estates.

The question arises of the extent to which their military involvement in the later eighteenth century was a direct continuation of a martial tradition dating back to the 1600s or earlier. In fact, quite a few did have such a tradition. About 40% of the Database Families who sent members into the army between 1750 and 1790 were descended in the male line directly from ancestors who had fought in Ireland with the English armies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Brookes and Coles in Ulster, and the Binghams and Blakeneys in Connacht being examples.[19] That is a sizeable proportion, enough to perpetuate what might be called a frontier settler mentality and tradition within the officer corps. But it also means that a majority of these families, 60%, had no direct tradition of military service before the eighteenth century. It has often been remarked, for example, that Wellington's own immediate family background was not an especially military one. He was commissioned in 1787, and his older brother William served briefly in the navy. But his father, Garret Wesley (Lord Mornington), was professor of music at Trinity College Dublin, and neither his uncles nor either grandfather had been soldiers.[20] The Wellesley military tradition in the early nineteenth century was as recent as the new spelling of their surname. But even amongst those families with seventeenth century military antecedents, many took a break from military service for a generation or two in the eighteenth century. One reason was the small size of the army after the War of the Spanish Succession, which meant that opportunities were limited, but equally important was their pressing need to rebuild their estates and political fortunes after the upheavals of the 1690s. In Fermanagh, for example, the Coles, prominent in the seventeenth century wars, spent the first half of the eighteenth restoring their finances, and with considerable success, as evidenced by the building of their great mansion, Florence Court, and their elevation

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Armee zwischen Ancien Regime und Reichsgründung, (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2008), pp. 72-95.

[19]There were 58 such families, out of 145 with members in the army in the later eighteenth century (Families Database).

[20]Rory Muir, *Wellington: The Path to Victory 1769-1814* (London: Yale, 2013), pp. 5-11.

to the Earldom of Enniskillen.[21] They returned to military service in the 1780s, with Lowry Cole going on to a distinguished career. Overall, only one in ten of the Database Families could trace an unbroken run of military service back to the wars of the 1690s, which is why the Irish gentry's military tradition, in the sense of a multi-generational connection to the British Army as an institution, is best seen as a product of the second half of the eighteenth century.

Sitting alongside their enthusiasm for military service, however, was their sometimes fraught relationship with the British government, towards which their collective attitude for much of the period was a blend of dependence, conditional loyalty and occasional resentment. They were fully aware that their privileged position rested ultimately on British military power, demonstrated again in 1798, and they themselves contributed to that military capability by serving as officers in large numbers; but this was coupled with insecurity and, frequently, suspicion of government motives. For its part, the British government did sustain their position in Ireland for decades, was happy to avail of their services and opened up significant opportunities for them. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the army acted as an instrument of integration, with Irish officers serving in almost every regiment and often using military careers as a springboard. Wellington's rise from younger son of a middling landed family in County Meath to commander-in-chief and subsequently Prime Minister is the most spectacular example.

Yet, in the final analysis, the government was prepared to sacrifice their interests in the face of wider political considerations and often had no option but to do so. Edward Spiers, writing of the officer corps as a whole in the nineteenth century, has noted, in the context of officers still needing private incomes, that though the state might not adequately reward them financially for their services, it 'guarded their privileges and possessions and, if only for this reason, they owed it loyalty''.[22] But while that was true for the Irish landed class until the middle of the nineteenth century, it was not the case thereafter. From that point the state, far from guarding 'their privileges and possessions', systematically dismantled them, through parliamentary and local government reform, land reform and, under Liberal governments, support for Home Rule. The Irish gentry were the only major 'feeder-group' to the British officer corps whose political and economic power was substantially dismantled so quickly and comprehensively as a matter of government policy. And while they formed a part, post-Union, of a wider British imperial ruling class and saw themselves as such, and while their mass attendance at British public schools and, increasingly, Sandhurst and

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[21]A.P.W. Malcomson, 'The Enniskillen Family, Estate and Archive', *Clogher Record*, 16, 2 (1998), pp. 81-122.

[22]Edward M. Spiers, *The Army and Society 1815-1914,* (London: Longman, 1980), pp. 1-2. Spiers is here quoting another historian, W. L. Burns.

Woolwich gave them a commonality of accent, appearance and outlook with their English and Scottish counterparts, their domestic political situation meant they were not in the same position as the landed families of Hampshire or Perthshire.[23]

Tensions between the Irish gentry and the British government flared up periodically. It is no coincidence that they often did so in wartime or as hostilities threatened, when circumstances forced governments to take difficult decisions but, paradoxically, also when large numbers from Irish landed families were either already in military service or seeking access to it. During the American War of Independence, for example, the Volunteer movement, originally a defensive force against the threat of invasion in which the Irish gentry were heavily involved, became politicised in large part because of British wartime economic and other policies. At the start of the French Revolutionary War Pitt's Catholic relief measures, designed to secure Catholic support and manpower for the war effort, alarmed and alienated significant sections of the Protestant ruling class. The Act of Union, itself a wartime measure, and the accompanying debate over Catholic emancipation divided Irish ascendancy opinion and caused a conservative backlash at a time when thousands of Catholic Irish soldiers were on active service under the command of Irish landed officers. And though the Third Home Rule crisis of 1911-14 did not originate in an external conflict, the involvement in the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) of many former and some serving landed officers had obvious implications, as the Great War loomed, for both the cohesion of the then-serving officer corps, and the future reliability of one the army's key sources of officers.[24]

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[23]Nicholas Perry, 'The Irish Landed Class and the British Army, 1850-1950', *War in History*, 18, 3 (2011), pp. 304-332. For the officer corps in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, see Edward M. Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army 1868-1902,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 89-117; Timothy Bowman and Mark Connelly, *The Edwardian Army: Recruiting, Training and Deploying the British Army, 1902-1914,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 7-40.

[24]P.D.H. Smyth, 'The Volunteers and Parliament, 1779-84', in Thomas Bartlett and D.W. Hayton (eds), *Penal Era and Golden Age: Essays in Irish History, 1690-1800,* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1979), pp. 113-136; James Kelly, 'The politics of Volunteering 1778-93', *Irish Sword*, 22, 88 (2000), pp. 139-157; Ian McBride, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland: The Isle of Slaves,* (Dublin: Gill Books, 2009), pp. 377-381; Thomas Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation: The Catholic Question 1690-1830,* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1992), pp. 121-145 & pp. 244-267; Patrick M. Geoghegan, *The Irish Act of Union: A Study in High Politics 1798-1801,* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1999), pp. 130-155; Hew Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 8-18, & pp. 111-117.

One might have expected these controversies to have had some impact on the Irish gentry's willingness to serve, or indeed on the British state's willingness to employ them, but in fact it did not. The proportion of young men from the Database Families of military age, for example, serving in the army or navy in successive conflicts continued to rise steadily.[25] During the American War of Independence, despite the Volunteer movement and the clamour for legislative independence, the figure was 36%. In the French Revolutionary/Napoleonic Wars, notwithstanding controversies over Catholic relief and the traumas of the 1798 Rising and the Union, the proportion rose to 40%. In the 1850s, during the conflicts in the Crimea and India, the percentage was 45%, even though gentry self-confidence had been undermined politically and economically by Catholic emancipation and the Famine. In the Second Boer War it was 51%, the introduction of wide-ranging political and land reforms and two attempts to pass Home Rule legislation notwithstanding. And in the Great War, with a Home Rule act on the statue book and civil war in Ireland only narrowly (and temporarily) averted, military participation levels in these families, amongst this age group, soared to 79%.

Obviously, the wars against France from 1793-1815 and Germany from 1914-18 represented existential threats that the other conflicts did not. Even so, the fact that these families over a period of 150 years continued, despite their political insecurities, to come forward in their hundreds to fight the Americans, the French, the Russians, indigenous colonial opponents, the Boers and the Germans, demonstrates two things. First, the gentry's ability to compartmentalise their loyalties and see loyalty to King, country and empire as ideals standing above the policies of particular governments enabled them to reconcile these tensions most of the time. It would be unrealistic to expect officers to be immune to the socio-political concerns of their parent communities, but the vast majority of landed Irish officers, motivated by a mix of patriotism, idealism and self-interest, performed their duties professionally and loyally, irrespective of their personal views. The 1914 Home Rule crisis is the partial exception here, when some used an appeal to these 'higher' loyalties of monarchy and empire to justify refusal to implement government policy.[26] Secondly, the Irish gentry were not a political monolith. Officers like John Hely-Hutchinson and John Doyle were strong supporters of Catholic relief in the 1790s. In 1914, while landed officers inside the army, like Hubert Gough and Henry Wilson, worked to undermine Home Rule, others, like William Hickie, a Catholic officer, supported it; one conflicted serving officer, Oliver Nugent, commanding the UVF in Cavan, took steps to ensure that in

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[25]'Military age' for this purpose means those aged 25 or under at the outbreak of a war or who turned 16 (pre-1815) or 18 (post-1815) during it, serving in a regular or 'general service' wartime unit (though not necessarily seeing action).
[26]Strachan, *Politics of the British Army*, pp. 111-117; Beckett, *Army and the Curragh Incident 1914*, pp. 1-29.

his area at least there would be no confrontation with the police and army, and in so doing damaged his relationship with the wider Ulster Unionist leadership.[27]

This outcome of pragmatic accommodation with the state, rooted though it was in the Irish gentry's fundamental reliance on British power, was not inevitable. The militant opposition of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, for example, son of the Duke of Leinster, a former officer and one of the leaders of the 1798 Rising, is suggestive of a road not taken. As with a handful of other Irish ex-officers, like Richard Montgomery, killed commanding the American forces outside Quebec in 1775, or Thomas Russell, executed for his part in the Emmet rebellion of 1803, or Robert Barton, a leading figure in Sinn Fein during the Irish War of Independence, it is possible through Fitzgerald's radicalism to glimpse what another future for the gentry's relationship with the British state might have looked like.[28] But in the end, however disenchanted by particular government policies, the overwhelming majority of Irish landed officers acquiesced in them. Partly this was because of deep-seated loyalties and personal attachments, but it was also because, by the time government reforms really began to bite on their interests from the 1830s onwards, the political alternatives facing them were so unappealing that continued military service represented not just an honourable source of employment but also an indispensable one, practically and psychologically. The writer George A Bermingham castigated the Irish gentry in the nineteenth century for losing touch with the bulk of their fellow-countrymen through their obsession with military and colonial service: they had become, he said, 'dazzled with England's greatness and the prospect of Imperial power'.[29] But any prospect of a political dispensation in Ireland in which they might have played a leading role had arguably already passed with the failure to introduce Catholic emancipation at the time of the Union.

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[27]Peter Jupp, 'Hutchinson, John Hely-, second earl of Donoughmore (1757–1832)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Vol. 29, pp. 18-20; Alistair Massie, 'Doyle, Sir John, baronet (1756–1834)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 16, pp. 836-8; Keith Jeffery, *Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: A Political Soldier,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 120-125; David Murphy, 'Hickie, Sir William Bernard (1865-1950)', *Dictionary of Irish Biography,* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2009), Vol. 4, pp. 675-676; Nicholas Perry, *Major-General Oliver Nugent: The Irishman who led the Ulster Division in the Great War,* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2020), pp. 42-49.

[28]Stella Tillyard, *Citizen Lord: Edward Fitzgerald 1763-1798,* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997).

[29]Quoted in Mark Bence-Jones, *Twilight of the Ascendancy,* (London: Constable, 1987), p. 154.

Birth quartile	Adult males	Regular/war-time commissions (% of all males)	Army (% of commissions)	HEIC/Indian Army (% of commissions)	Royal Navy (% of commissions)
Ireland (134 families)					
1725-49	**196**	**43 (22%)**	37 (86%)	1 (2%)	5 (12%)
1750-74	**311**	**109 (35%)**	94 (86%)	3 (3%)	12 (11%)
1775-99	**307**	**127 (41%)**	98 (77%)	5 (4%)	24 (19%)
1800-24	**291**	**109 (37%)**	93 (85%)	3 (3%)	13 (12%)
1825-49	**247**	**117 (47%)**	94 (80%)	4 (4%)	19 (16%)
Total	**1352**	**505 (37%)**	416 (82%)	16 (3%)	73 (15%)
Scotland (55 families)					
1725-49	**91**	**29 (32%)**	22 (76%)	0	7 (24%0
1750-74	**107**	**41 (38%)**	36 (88%)	1 (3%)	4 (10%)
1775-99	**113**	**37 (33%)**	26 (70%)	2 (5%)	9 (24%)
1800-24	**129**	**51 (40%)**	28 (55%)	11 (22%)	12 (23%)
1825-49	**109**	**50 (46%)**	44 (88%)	1 (1%)	5 (10%)
Total	**549**	**208 (38%)**	156 (75%)	15 (7%)	37 (18%)
England & Wales (100 families)					
1725-49	**123**	**17 (14%)**	10 (59%)	0	7 (41%)
1750-74	**171**	**28 (16%)**	21 (75%)	0	7 (25%)
1775-99	**220**	**53 (24%)**	38 (72%)	1 (2%)	14 (26%)
1800-24	**261**	**70 (27%)**	51 (73%)	4 (6%)	15 (21%)
1825-49	**231**	**83 (36%)**	68 (82%)	1 (1%)	14 (17%)
Total	**1006**	**251 (25%)**	188 (75%)	6 (2%)	57 (23%)

Number/distribution of families, by country: Ireland 134 (from all 32 counties); Scotland 55 (Highlands 16, Central/North-East 18, Lowlands/Borders 21); England & Wales 100 (Wales 10, North 22, Midlands 24, E Anglia 13, South-East 16, South-West 15). Families those with estates of ≥3,000 acres/£3,000 annual valuation in Bateman. Core families: landowners, sons, brothers, fathers/uncles.
Sources: John Bateman, *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland* (Leicester University Press 1971, reprint of 1883 edn of 1871 original: New York, 1971); *Burke's Peerage/Landed Gentry*; army lists.

Table 2: Military Participation Rates in Landed Families of Britain and Ireland, males born 1725-1849, core families.

How, then, does the Irish gentry's military involvement compare with their counterparts in Britain? Table 2 looks at the military participation rates of Irish, Scots and English landed families, for males born between 1725 and 1849. (The focus, for practical reasons, is on wealthier families, those with estates of over 3,000

acres/£3,000pa valuation in the 1870s who had owned estates in the eighteenth century.) As can be seen, the most striking feature is the similarity of the overall Irish and Scottish figures, at 37% and 38% respectively. The Scots were more likely to join the navy and the Indian Army, and so the number of Irish going into the British army was proportionately greater. The proportion for England and Wales, by contrast, was significantly lower, at around a quarter, and while for the eighteenth century the figures may be somewhat underestimated – again, perhaps by around 10% – this does not change the overall picture.[30] The Irish and the Scots gentry were consistently readier to pursue military careers than their English and Welsh counterparts.

John Cookson has described the British gentry in the 1790s as amongst the least militarised elites in Europe, which he ascribes to the greater opportunities provided by civilian society in Britain, limited military patronage, and the army's lower social importance.[31] That, it seems, was true of the English gentry but not their Irish and Scots counterparts. Andrew Mackillop's work on the Scottish Highland gentry's engagement with the army in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries has looked at both the mechanics, including the importance of raising men for military service, and also the political and economic consequences for the region, not least of over-recruitment. In so doing he identifies parallels with the Irish experience but also demonstrates that the political and social context within which the Scots pursued military service was unique. This underscores the point that, while regional elites across the British Isles shared the same objective of accessing military service, their routes to achieving it and the political circumstances in which they did so were different.[32]

Regional differences in the make-up of its officer corps were not, of course, confined to the British Army: similar variations were also apparent, to take one example, in the Prussian Army of the late eighteenth century. In recent decades there has been increased interest in this and related topics amongst scholars in Germany, reflecting

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[30]This pattern is consistent with a separate study of landed families looking at males born 1830-1929 who received regular army commissions; there the national breakdowns were Ireland 39%, Scotland 40% and England and Wales 30% (Perry, 'Irish Landed Class', pp. 313-5 & Table 2). The English still, however, represented the largest national grouping within the officer corps throughout the period.

[31]Cookson, *Armed Nation*, p. 22.

[32]Andrew MacKillop, *'More Fruitful than the Soil': Army, Empire and the Scottish Highlands 1715-1815,* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000. Also, Matthew P. Dziennik, 'Hierarchy, authority and jurisdiction in the mid eighteenth- century recruitment of the highland regiments', *Historical Research,* 85, 227 (2012), pp. 89-104; Victoria Henshaw, *Scotland and the British Army, 1700-1750: Defending the Union,* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 53-118.

both growing academic engagement with 'war and society' studies and the practical impact of reunification in opening up archives in eastern Germany.[33] An example is Carmen Winkel's examination of the operation of patronage in the eighteenth-century Prussian Army, *Im Netz des Königs*, and her other work on routes into the officer corps for the Brandenburg-Prussian nobility.[34] Under Frederick the Great and his father the landed class were put under huge pressure to serve as officers, but Dr Winkel demonstrates that the process was more complex, and involved a greater degree of negotiation, than traditional pictures of Prussian absolutism might suggest. As part of that research she, like other German scholars, has done detailed work on an aspect previously noted by Christopher Duffy, the large variations in levels of officer service in different parts of the Prussian kingdom, the so-called 'regionalism of service'.[35]

Winkel has made particular use of the vassal tables, lists drawn up, by order of the king, of Prussian landowners, the value of their estates and whether they and their sons had served or were serving in the army. Table 3 summarizes her findings regarding the percentage of landowners and their sons with military service in the different regions, not just the eastern provinces traditionally regarded as Junker territory, but the western districts also, at the end of the eighteenth century.[36] Also included in the table, as a point of comparison, is a snapshot of participation levels in 1800 amongst Irish Database Family landowners and their sons in the army, navy and

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[33]See, for example, Ralf Pröve, *Militär, Staat und Gesellschaft im 19. Jahrhundert* [1763-1890], (Munich: R Oldenbourg Verlag, 2006); Bernhard R. Kroener, 'Militär in der Gesellschaft. Aspekte einer neuen Militärgeschichte der Frühen Neuzeit', in Ralf Pröve & Bruno Thoss, eds, *Bernard R Kroener. Kriegerische Gewalt und militärische Präsenz in der Neuzeit,* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2008), pp. 65-82.

[34]Carmen Winkel, *Im Netz des Königs: Netzwerke und Patronage in der preussischen Armee 1713-1786,* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2013); idem., '"Getreue wie goldt"'; idem., 'The King and His Army: A New Perspective on the Military in 18th Century Brandenburg-Prussia', *International Journal of Military History and Historiography*, 39 (2019), pp. 34-62; idem., 'Eighteenth-Century Military and Princely Rule. Brandenburg-Prussia as a Prime Example?', in Markus Meumann & Andrea Pühringer, eds, *The Military in the Early Modern World: A Comparative Approach,* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2020), pp. 67-88.

[35]Duffy, *Army of Frederick the Great*, p. 39 & p. 52. Also Frank Göse, 'Zwishen Garnison und Rittergut: Aspekte der Verknüpfung von Adelsforschung und Militärgeschichte am Beispiel Brandenburg-Preussens', in Ralf Pröve, ed., *Klio in Uniform: Probleme und Perspektiven einer modernen Militärgeshichte der Fruhen Neuzeit*, (Bohlau Verlag: Köln, 1997), pp. 109-142; Frank Behr, Adel und Militär in Ost- und Westpreußen zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts, PhD thesis, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (2021).

[36]The patchy survival of vassal tables precludes comparisons across all Prussian provinces over lengthy periods.

HEIC. And, while not comparing precisely like with like in terms of either the statistics or the very different societies and armies under discussion, there are parallels worth exploring.

Region	% of Estate Owners with military service (a)	% of Estate Owners' Sons with military service (a)
Kurmark	59%	82%
Pomerania	44%	60%
East Prussia	58%	56%
Magdeburg	40%	41%
Upper Silesia	20%	40%
Kleve	5%	19%
Ireland (b)	20%	40%
a. For Prussian regions, military service refers to service in the regular army, percentages derived from vassal tables drawn up between 1791-1804, as follows: Kleve 1791, Magdeburg 1796, Upper Silesia 1798/9, Kurmark 1800, East Prussia 1802, Pomerania 1804.		
b. For Ireland, military service includes the navy & HEIC, from 174 Database Families: breakdown – estate owners 174, military service 35, 20% (all army); sons 509, military service 202, 40% (incl 29 RN (6%) & HEIC 9 (2%)). [The figures for owners' brothers, not included in the table, are: total 349, military service 145, 42% (incl RN 22 (15%) & HEIC 5 (3%)).]		
Sources: Winkel, 'Getreue wie goldt', pp202-13; Families Database.		

Table 3: Percentage of Prussian and Irish Landed Estate Owners and Sons with military service, c1800

Winkel identifies various reasons, political, religious and economic, for the differences in enthusiasm for military service, including looking at the connection between estate size/wealth and military service. Kleve, for example, the region with the lowest levels of military service and strongest resistance to royal pressure, was markedly more prosperous than the other provinces; it also had a high proportion of Catholic nobility and close connections to the Netherlands. In Silesia, relatively recently incorporated into the kingdom, links to the Habsburg empire and Catholic church remained strong. By contrast, in the Kurmark, the prosperous area around Potsdam and Berlin, service levels were high, and proximity to royal authority was clearly a factor there with effectively the conscription of landed officers. But Pomerania and East Prussia from an Irish perspective are of particular interest. Their landowners were Protestant and royalist in outlook, somewhat removed geographically from the metropolitan centre, and relatively less wealthy than some other regional elites, with smaller estates and

fewer alternative career opportunities, yet not so impoverished that military careers were unaffordable.[37]

There are features in common here with their Irish counterparts. In the nineteenth century the pattern amongst the Irish gentry too was that poorer landed families often could not afford military careers, rich families could but their members frequently did not stay in the army for long, and so most landed career officers came from families whose prosperity ranged from adequate to comfortable.[38] A detailed comparison for the second half of the eighteenth century is difficult because no comprehensive lists of estates/incomes exist, but the evidence of the Database Families suggests that the same general picture holds true. Two further aspects of Prussian military service discussed by Winkel are also relevant to the Irish experience. The first is the importance of 'self-recruitment', with regional military traditions becoming self-reinforcing as family connections and existing patronage networks made military careers often the easiest path for younger sons to follow.[39] This was evidenced in Ireland, as in Britain, by the existence of famously military families, such as the Brookes, Brownlows, Goughs, Pakenhams and Vandeleurs.[40] The second aspect is the human cost of military service. Winkel points out the heavy officer losses the Prussians suffered during the Seven Years War, with around 1,500 being killed from an officer corps 5,500 strong at the start of the war; it is estimated that 23% of Prussian officers who disappeared from the army lists between 1756 and 1763 died on active service.[41] The same is true of the Irish landed class during the Napoleonic and First World Wars. In the Great War, 75% of young men aged 15 to 30 in 1914 from Irish landed families served in the armed forces, one in four being killed. In the Napoleonic wars, amongst

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[37]Winkel, 'Getreue wie goldt', pp. 202-213.

[38]Perry, 'Irish Landed Class', pp. 318-320 & Table 4.

[39]Winkel, 'Getreue wie goldt', pp. 206-208. Self-recruitment in Ireland (and Britain) was a particular feature of landed families' cadet branches. In 1875, for example, the 178 Database landowners had 353 sons, 170 (48%) of whom obtained regular army/navy commissions; of these 48, or 28%, had a father with regular service. Of the landowners' 375 nephews (on the male side) – that is, the sons of their younger brothers - 146 (39%) were commissioned, of whom 77 (53%) were following a father who was a regular officer.

[40]Of 55 male Vandeleurs of Kilrush, County Clare, born between 1750-1950, 39 (71%) became army officers, 19 reaching lieutenant-colonel or higher and seven dying on operations; 53 Brookes of Colebrooke, County Fermanagh, and their cadet branches served in the two world wars, 12 being killed (Perry, 'Irish Landed Class', pp. 310, & pp. 328-329).

[41]Winkel, 'Getreue wie goldt', p. 203, fn. 26; idem., 'Ziele und Grenzen der königlichen Personalpolitik im Militär', in Frank Gröse, ed., *Friedrich der Grosse und die Mark Brandenburg: Herrschaftspraxis in der Provinz,* (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2012), p. 148.

the Database Families, participation levels were lower at about 40% but the casualty rates amongst those who served in the army were comparable, with a fatality rate of 23%; amongst those who deployed outside the British Isles it was even higher (c.27%), with the Caribbean and the Peninsula being the most lethal theatres.[42] There are grounds, therefore, for suggesting, and exploring further, that the Irish gentry as a militarised regional landed elite were, if not quite Bill Barnett's Irish Junkers, the British Army's equivalent of the Pomeranians.

With 2022 being the centenary of the disbandment of the southern Irish regiments, it is appropriate to conclude by looking briefly at the gentry's relationship with the Irish infantry regiments. Many landed families had close connections with them, including the Earls of Granard with the Royal Irish Regiment (18th Regiment of Foot), the Blakeneys and the Coles with the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers (27th Regiment of Foot) and the Goughs and Doyles with the Royal Irish Fusiliers (87th Regiment of Foot). But for the most part, and certainly before the territorialization of the infantry in the 1880s, Irish landed families pursued careers in the most senior or prestigious regiments they could afford, something they had in common with Prussian families, regardless of national/regional affiliation. Of 959 regular and wartime army Database officers, 85 (under 9%) served in one of the eight Irish line infantry regiments or their predecessor regiments. The formation of the Irish Guards in 1901 provided a significant new focus for wealthier families, but often the gentry's immediate connection with the Irish line regiments was through their militia and special reserve battalions, in which county families were frequently represented. Probably the gentry's closest relationship with the southern Irish regiments came during the First World War, with the raising of service battalions and the incessant demand for officers.[43] The Great War, with Irish independence just round the corner, represented the swansong, not just of the southern regiments, but also the southern Irish gentry, at least in the form they had existed for over two centuries. Yet the military traditions of both in a sense survive, with the descendants of many of these families, albeit some no longer resident in Ireland, continuing to serve in the British Army, and with the Irish infantry tradition maintained through the Irish Guards and the Royal Irish Regiment.

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[42]Perry, 'Irish Landed Class', p. 328; Families Database.
[43]Perry, 'Irish Landed Class', pp. 328-30.