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# The Nenagh Mutiny of 7-8 July 1865: a re-appraisal

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## ABSTRACT

*Mutinies or 'affrays' by regular and militia soldiers were a constant feature of British military life and civil-military relations during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; neither were they absent from the early twentieth century. This article re-evaluates one such event: that by the North Tipperary Militia in Ireland in 1856. The event is set within both a heretofore lacking Irish social and political context and the broader context of British Army mutinies as a whole.*

## Introduction

Of all the events that occurred in Ireland at the time of the Crimean War of 1854-6, two have become embedded in the popular folklore of Ireland and the Irish counties in which they occurred. These were the national 'Crimean Banquet', held at Dublin City on 22 October 1856, and the 'Nenagh Mutiny' which transpired nearly four months earlier on 7-8 July in County Tipperary.<sup>1</sup> During a violent protest against the abysmal conditions of the regiment's imminent disembodiment, the soldiers of the North Tipperary Militia imprisoned their officers, temporarily took over the town and after a day's rioting were suppressed by regular troops. Although Nenagh was the only incident of an armed mutiny by militia during the Crimean War, our understanding of the reasons for this 'outrage' remain confused. Despite it being a well-known event, the details of which have been extensively studied by military historians, the memory of this mutiny in Ireland does not elicit comparable feelings and emotions of national

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<sup>1</sup>For the most recent account of the Nenagh mutiny in the context of the Crimean War see Paul Huddie, *The Crimean War and Irish Society* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), pp. 147-9 & for the banquet see pp. 70-4.

uprising or resistance to those in India as a result of the far larger mutiny of the Indian army, only a year later.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this article is two-fold. Firstly, to provide a social and political context to this event, which has heretofore remained absent from both Irish and British historiographies. Secondly, to answer three specific questions: 1) what were the root causes of the mutiny at Nenagh; 2) where does the Nenagh Mutiny sit within the broader history of mutiny in Ireland, Britain and the British Empire from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, and how unique was it in relation to the same; 3) what was wider Irish society's perceptions of the mutiny particularly in the press, by Irish military and civil leaders and by Irish parliamentarians?<sup>3</sup>

The Nenagh Mutiny began on 7 July 1856 and lasted twenty-four hours. Men of the North Tipperary Militia disobeyed and subsequently imprisoned their officers. The disaffected men took control of the town for a short period and proceeded to attack the premises of the civil authorities, including the two police barracks, as well as private dwellings. The following day the district commander, Major-General Sir James Chatterton dispatched 500 regular British Army infantry (41st, 47th and 50th Foot) and 100 Lancers from the nearby garrison towns of Templemore and Birr, and after some street fighting, the mutiny was suppressed, leaving several mutineers and soldiers dead. Seventy militiamen were arrested, ten were put on trial and nine were convicted.<sup>4</sup>

Although violent affrays by the military were not uncommon, the use of fire arms and the loss of life at Nenagh was unusual.<sup>5</sup> Prior to Nenagh, the weapons reportedly utilised the most often in similar Irish disturbances were fists, sticks, stones, brickbats and the bayonet, so the most serious outcome was men being 'severely or dangerously wounded'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>For the Indian Mutiny's effect on modern Indian national consciousness, see Hugh Tinker, '1857 and 1957: The Mutiny and Modern India' in *International Affairs*, xxxiv, no. 1 (January, 1958), p. 57.

<sup>3</sup>See the recent publication of a comparable study of the 1920 Connaught Rangers mutiny at Solon, India by Mario Draper: 'Mutiny under the Sun: The Connaught Rangers, India, 1920' in *War in History* (published online 25 February 2019). Accessed 8 March 2019.

<sup>4</sup>For a full account of the events at Nenagh in 1856, including witness statements, the report of the military court of inquiry and the military and civil correspondences after the event see the Chief Secretary's papers (CSORP) in the National Archives of Ireland, MSS 16406, 16431, 16447, 16510, 17074, 20790-3 and 22042.

<sup>5</sup>Huddie, *The Crimean War*, pp. 148.

<sup>6</sup>*Derby Mercury*, 16 May 1855.

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While Nenagh shared multiple characteristics with other mutinies from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, it contrasts with other military outrages that occurred in Ireland during the Crimean War because it elicited widespread public sympathy. And while this sympathy was unique during the war with Russia, it was not unknown in relation to other mutinies involving Irish regiments. Most importantly, that of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in 1887 at Pietermartizburg in Natal, South Africa, where, after a small affray which left two soldiers dead, the ringleader, Belfast-born Private Joseph McCrea, was the subject of a high-level clemency campaign that the governor of Natal refused to countenance.<sup>7</sup>

Most studies of the Nenagh mutiny by the historians of Ireland and the Crimean War have addressed the events from a military perspective: giving blow-by-blow accounts of the outrage and detailing the subsequent actions of the regular and militia units and the key personalities involved.<sup>8</sup> An exception is the author's analysis of the views of Irish politicians in both Houses of Parliament in the immediate aftermath of the mutiny, as well as a brief engagement with the responses of the Irish military and civil executives.<sup>9</sup> Given the general lack of such a broad context before there is a need to re-evaluate the events of 7-8 July 1856. This study is not another military analysis of the mutiny, instead it examines the perceptions and feelings of Irish society about Nenagh, and which were made manifest through the subsequent Court of Inquiry, contemporary press reports, the arguments of Irish parliamentarians and the attitudes of the most senior military and political men in Ireland.

Multiple sources have been included from the official records of the political and military authorities in Ireland at Dublin Castle (the Chief Secretary of Ireland's papers, National Archives of Ireland) and at the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, (the Kilmainham papers, National Library of Ireland) which have not been used in previous studies of Nenagh. In addition, a cross-section of Irish newspapers have been examined: Protestant and Catholic; Conservative and Liberal; together with the Hansard parliamentary proceedings.

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<sup>7</sup>For more see Graham Dominy, *Last Outpost on the Zulu Frontier: Fort Napier and the British imperial garrison* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2016), chapter 8.

<sup>8</sup>Rob Robinson, 'The Nenagh Mutiny' in *War Correspondent*, xviii, no. 4 (January, 2001), pp. 14-18; David

Murphy, "'Battle of the breeches": the Nenagh mutiny, July 1856' in *Tipperary Historical Journal*, (2001), pp. 139-45; David Murphy, *Ireland and the Crimean War* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), pp. 197-206; William Butler, *The Irish Amateur Military Tradition in the British Army, 1854-1992* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), pp. 117, 166.

<sup>9</sup>Huddie, *The Crimean War*, pp. 30-2; pp.147-9.

## Overview: The Incidence of Mutiny in the British Army

It is necessary to understand the double context in which the Nenagh Mutiny occurred. Firstly, the context of the Crimean War when the North Tipperary Infantry was re-embodied and called up for full time service in 1854-5. The same applied to other Irish and Scottish Militia regiments which all served as the Regular Army's principal recruitment mechanism. English and Welsh militia regiments had already been re-embodied in 1852 in response to a French invasion scare.<sup>10</sup> Secondly, Nenagh occurred in 1856, barely eleven years after the first potato crop failure and only five years after the resultant Irish Famine had come to an end.<sup>11</sup> While the Famine had an apparent effect upon enlistment numbers into the Regulars in 1845-7, it had no direct influence upon the Tipperary Infantry or the Irish Militia more generally, because of their dis-embodied state.<sup>12</sup>

Mutinies have been the focus of continuous and multifaceted research and as Peter Way, Kaushik Roy, Graham Dominy and Thomas Bartlett have all shown, mutinies are not a modern phenomenon.<sup>13</sup> British soldiers, have on many occasions, both threatened or engaged in 'collective violence' or have withheld their labour in response to economic or multiple other motivations.<sup>14</sup> However, in 1856, there is one other aspect that the authorities did not consider and which may explain why the mutiny occurred at Nenagh and nowhere else at that time. Tipperary had an extremely poor record of agricultural unrest in the nineteenth century. According to James Donnelly and William Vaughan, during the Famine years of 1845-51, Tipperary had nineteen times more evictions than Fermanagh, the county with the lowest number.

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<sup>10</sup>For more this and above see Huddie, *The Crimean War*, pp. 143.

<sup>11</sup>Huddie, *The Crimean War*, p. 198. For more on Ireland's post-famine recovery see Chapter 6.

<sup>12</sup>For more on the enlistment numbers throughout the United Kingdom in 1844-7 see *Returns of the establishment of the British army at home and abroad in 1846, 1847 and 1848, and on the 1st January 1845 and 1848; also, number of recruits for the British army admitted from 1844 to 1847*, p. 5, H.C. 1847-48, (228), xli, 23.

<sup>13</sup>Peter Way, 'Rebellion of the Regulars: Working Soldiers and the Mutiny of 1763-1764' in *William and Mary Quarterly*, lvii, no. 4 (October, 2000), pp.761-92; Kaushik Roy, 'Coercion through Leniency: British Manipulation of the Courts-Martial System in the Post-Mutiny Indian Army, 1859-1913' in *Journal of Military History*, lxx, no. 4 (October, 2001), pp. 937-64; Dominy, *Last Outpost*, chapter 8; Thomas Bartlett, 'The Connaught Rangers Mutiny India, July 1920' in *History Ireland*, vi, no. 1 (Spring, 1998), pp. 5-7; Thomas Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation: the Catholic question 1690-1830* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1992), pp. 182-3.

<sup>14</sup>Way, 'Rebellion of the Regulars', p. 761.

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The region was also the scene of ‘the most desperate agrarian crimes in the period’ and this may have, potentially, created men of a more volatile nature.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout the Crimean War, as in any year, the Irish military authorities at the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham were inundated with reports of mutinous or riotous confrontations. On 3 May 1855 ‘an unfortunate collision’ took place between the regulars of the Clonmel depot and the South Tipperary Artillery. Four months later a ‘party of’ the Galway Militia attacked a police barracks at Loughrea. In July 1856 a ‘collision’ occurred between ‘the townspeople’ of Enniskillen and the Donegal (Militia) Infantry.<sup>16</sup> These are just a sample from a ledger full of similar reports. Yet such outrages were not unique to Irish regiments; similar outbursts were conducted by other British army and militia regiments across the United Kingdom before, during and after the Crimean War. For example, on 13 May 1855 a ‘riot of a very serious character’ occurred at Plymouth between the Royal Marines and the 2nd Royal Cheshire Militia, having developed from ‘disputes at the beer houses in the town’. On 29 May 1856 the 3rd West York Militia became involved in ‘a melee’ with civilians on the quayside at Belfast during their embarkation for Britain.<sup>17</sup> Like Kilmainham, the army authorities at Horse Guards in London would no doubt have received weekly reports of such incidents. It should also be noted that these affrays were not relegated to the home station during the war, but also broke out amongst troops en-route to India and the East during the Russian war. In October 1854 elements of the 50th and 55th Regiments of Foot became insubordinate and violent on board the troopship *Jars* which led to a certain portion of the ship’s water casks being destroyed. Two men were given fifty lashes at sea, with two loaded cannons being trained upon the prisoners and 100 men of the 63rd Foot being appointed as armed sentries over the same.<sup>18</sup>

Despite its chronological proximity to the events in India of 1857-9 the outrage at Nenagh bears no comparison in terms of violence; rather it should be more readily and appropriately compared to events such as that at Natal in 1887 and Solon in 1920 both of which, coincidentally, perhaps, involved Irish regiments. The first involved the

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<sup>15</sup>J.S. Donnelly, Jr., *Landlord and Tenant in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973), p. 39; W.E. Vaughan, *Landlords and Tenants in Mid-Victorian Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 25.

<sup>16</sup>Circular to officers commanding the depot 2nd Lancers Royal Regt and the South Tipperary Militia Artillery, Kilkenny, 7 May [1855] (Trinity College Dublin, Donoughmore Papers (DP), H/14/3/26); [Unknown] to Lord Seaton, 22 Sept. 1855, 4 Jul. 1856 (National Library of Ireland, Kilmainham Papers (KP), MS 1290).

<sup>17</sup>*Derby Mercury*, 16 May 1855; *Belfast News-Letter*, 30 May 1856.

<sup>18</sup>*Mayo Constitution*, 28 Nov. 1854.

Inniskillings and the second the Connaught Rangers.<sup>19</sup> Taking the latter as an example, and leaving aside the nationalist rhetoric and motivations of that mutiny's leaders, James Daly and Joseph Hawes, the principal reasons for the 1920 mutiny were attributed, by the regimental historian, Bartlett and more recently by Draper, to factors 'within the regiment'. The former argued these to be the fledgling nature of the men: '[e]nlisted in 1919 and shipped out immediately to India', who were then subjected to a 'rigorous training schedule on the plains of the Punjab at the hottest season of the year'.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, and most importantly, Bartlett and Draper both argue that it was principally due to 'poor officer–man relations'; 'their officers had been remarkably irresolute and incompetent'.<sup>21</sup> As will be seen later, such a multitude of similar factors, which Bartlett termed 'combustible material to make a protest', were present amongst most Irish regiments during 1856 and 1920, but only the units that mutinied had the requisite spark – meaning leadership within the men of the militia – to initiate an event.<sup>22</sup> Dominy makes a similar argument for the Inniskillings.<sup>23</sup>

We should also bear in mind that civil and military relations with the militia of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland were not always negative; indeed, multiple reports both in the press and to the military authorities at Dublin illustrate this. On 28 September 1855 Mr Peter A. Flynn, Esq., of Galway sent a memorial to Lord Seaton 'from the inhabitants of Galway', which described their 'favourable opinion of the general conduct of the Galway Militia'. This apparently gave the Commander of the Forces in Ireland, Lord Seaton 'much satisfaction'.<sup>24</sup> Such praise was not solely reserved for a county's own militia regiment. Units from elsewhere in Ireland or Britain were also celebrated by the people of the locality in which they were garrisoned. One example of this was the Kilkenny Fusiliers. In September 1855 they were reported as having become a favourite of the people of Limerick, who regularly turned out to watch and cheer them as they marched with their band.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Response of the Irish Newspapers**

Following the suppression of the Nenagh mutiny, Irish newspapers, especially between 8 and 14 July, expressed a variety of emotions and opinions towards the event and its

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<sup>19</sup>For an overview of the event see Thomas Bartlett, 'The Connaught Rangers Mutiny India, July 1920' in *History Ireland*, vi, no. 1 (Spring, 1998), pp. 5-7. See also Dominy, *Last Outpost*, chapter 8.

<sup>20</sup>Bartlett, 'Rangers Mutiny', p. 5. See also Draper, 'Mutiny under the Sun', p. 12.

<sup>21</sup>Bartlett, 'Rangers Mutiny', p.5; Draper, 'Mutiny under the Sun', p. 3.

<sup>22</sup>Bartlett, 'Rangers Mutiny', pp.5-6; Draper, 'Mutiny under the Sun', p. 21.

<sup>23</sup>Dominy, *Last Outpost*, pp. 93, 100, 105, 107.

<sup>24</sup>James Colborne, Lord Seaton's Military Secretary, to Peter A. Flynn, Esq., 20 Oct. 1855 (KP, MS 1221).

<sup>25</sup>*Limerick Reporter*, 11 Sept. 1855.

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causation. Terms such as ‘calamitous’, ‘disastrous’, ‘lamentable’ and ‘disgrace’ were used in a wide cross-section of newspapers, and although many cast blame upon the government few, except the *Nation* and those like it, actually took pleasure in what had occurred.<sup>26</sup> Eight days after its outbreak the *Limerick Reporter* declared that:

The universal press of Great Britain and Ireland condemns in the most unreserved and unqualified manner the bad faith of the Government in reference to the North Tipperary Light Infantry. Nothing could surpass the folly and short sightedness, if not the criminality and heartlessness, observed towards the Militia generally by the Executive; but the want of common sense and common honesty, in dealing with the Tipperary Regiment in particular were so apparent, that no one is astonished that mutiny has been the result.<sup>27</sup>

Similar anger was expressed in both Louth and Belfast. While the *Dundalk Democrat* declared ‘[t]he whole affair is a disgrace to the government’, the *Belfast News-Letter* of the previous day focussed on the perceived causation. Referring to the regulations issued in the previous April, it described them as ‘unfair’, worthy of ‘indignation’, and ‘derogatory to the character of the government’, which had brought ‘sorrow’ on the people.<sup>28</sup>

Yet, a sense of shame and pity was also very evident across the country and an attempt to try and explain what had happened was paramount in all papers. Although most of the press focussed their attention and energies on analysing the events and pointing the finger of blame, the *Freeman’s Journal* attempted to salvage the reputation of the Tipperary Regiment and the common ‘proverbial’ Tipperary soldier. In Cork the *Southern Reporter* attempted the same for the Irish Militia as a whole.<sup>29</sup> Having described the events at Nenagh as ‘lamentable’, it argued that ‘Ireland ought to be, and is, justly proud; and many of its counties have reason to be proud of the character and formation of the corps raised within them’. The *Southern Reporter* went on to draw attention to the regiment of Kerry, in which ‘a finer body of men no county in Ireland sent to defend its county’. It described the Kerry Militia as having marched ‘in and out of the town, on the eve of premature dis-embodiment, with cheerfulness, contentedness, and obedience pictured in each man’s face’. Not only was a stark ‘contrast’ drawn between the responses of the two regiments to their disembodiment but so was the demeanour of their reciprocal garrison town.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>*Banner of Ulster*, 12 Jul. 1856; *Nation*, 12 Jul. 1856; *Limerick Observer*, 11 Jul. 1856; *Dundalk Democrat*, 12 Jul. 1856.

<sup>27</sup>*Limerick Reporter*, 15 Jul. 1856.

<sup>28</sup>*Dundalk Democrat*, 12 Jul. 1856; *Belfast News-Letter*, 11 Jul. 1855.

<sup>29</sup>*Freeman’s Journal*, 11 Jul. 1856 citing *Limerick Reporter*.

<sup>30</sup>*Cork Southern Reporter*, 12 Jul. 1856.

While ‘every door and window [in Tralee] were filled with anxious and delighted spectators and the streets were lined with confiding friends’, in Nenagh the windows ‘were barred, to prevent desolation and death’. Yet for all ‘their rash and wildly foolish procedure, and their reckless disregard for the lives, and property, and comfort of their own countrymen, in whose town they were located’, some, if not most of the papers did not wish to see the men receive the traditional punishment for mutiny – death.<sup>31</sup> The *Limerick Observer* believed that it was a shame ‘to think that brave men, who yesterday morning arose in health and strength should, for a disputed point, involving the value or the difference of only a few shillings, have had recourse to violence, and have paid the forfeit so suddenly with their lives’.<sup>32</sup> Certainly its county contemporary the *Southern Reporter* believed that their case deserved ‘the utmost leniency, and we hope and trust a merciful view may be taken of it’.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Irish Militia and the Mutiny: Parliament’s Response**

The Irish peoples’ response towards the initial 1854-55 embodiment and recruitment of the Irish Militia (and the need for men to transfer to the regular line regiments) in the press and through their parliamentary representatives in the Lords and the Commons was generally positive in 1854-55. However, the process of disembodiment of those same regiments less than two years later became mired in scandal, initially through protests at the manner in which units were being disembodied and then by the Nenagh mutiny itself.

The Nenagh Mutiny also heightened the temperature of Irish opposition in the Commons; something which had largely remained within the bounds of ‘critical patriotism’ throughout the war.<sup>34</sup> The issues, poor pay and conditions as well as disbandment, that partly instigated the mutiny had been raised on multiple occasions in the preceding month. The government had failed to address these issues and it was this failure which evidently angered certain Irish representatives. Although the mutiny initially caused great consternation among some members in the Commons, mostly amongst those who were militia commanders, it disappeared from the agenda quite quickly; the swift sentencing of the mutineers and the government’s decision not to disband the militias most likely influenced this. Attributing the trouble to what Lord Naas (Conservative MP for Coleraine) described as ‘a few malcontents’ ensured that

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<sup>31</sup>*Freeman’s Journal*, 11 Jul. 1856 citing *Limerick Reporter*.

<sup>32</sup>*Limerick Observer*, 11 Jul. 1856.

<sup>33</sup>*Limerick Reporter*, 15 Jul. 1856.

<sup>34</sup>For more on Irish wartime patriotic criticism see Huddie, *The Crimean War*, chapter 1.

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the majority of the Irish Militia was accepted as being 'perfectly satisfied' and loyal.<sup>35</sup> In comparison, there was no debate over any plan to disembody the Scottish regiments. Two Scottish members did rise to speak during the Irish debates, but only to address the billeting of that force on the Scottish public.<sup>36</sup>

Before and during July 1856, a number of Irish MPs and the Irish representative peer, Viscount Dungannon continuously criticised the manner in which the Irish Militia soldiers were being discharged. They drew attention to the numerous monetary complaints which were rife within the force, the subpar clothing, the loss of bounty money on necessaries and a lack of actual pay.<sup>37</sup> These same issues were exacerbated by the failures of the Tipperary Militia's officers and commander and led to the events at Nenagh.

Like so many other topics which were discussed in parliament during the war, Irish MPs first obtained news of the incident through the press. The first reference to the mutiny in the House, which came from the Liberal MP for Roscommon and Colonel of the Roscommon Militia, Fitzstephen French on 10 July, was an attempt to seek verification from the Under-Secretary of the War Office, Frederick Peel, of what proved to be exaggerated reports in the press.<sup>38</sup> The following day, French illustrated the specifically Irish nature of the event and its underlying grievances. In a direct address to the Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, he declared that 'there was a general feeling in Ireland that the men had not been fairly treated', as their bounty had been paid in 'miserable' instalments and that their pay and treatment had been subpar.<sup>39</sup> French called on Palmerston to override the Secretary of War to ensure that the militia received all that was promised to them. In the opinion of Thomas Dunne, Conservative member for Dungarvan and Lieutenant-Colonel of the Queen's County Militia, both the men's pay and the bounty had been at the very heart of what he termed 'this unfortunate occurrence' at Nenagh.<sup>40</sup> In the Lords too, Irish members, some of whom were also militia commanders, including the Earl of Donoughmore, Lieutenant-Colonel of the Tipperary Artillery regiment, sought either clarification of the event or denounced the government's handling of the disembodiment.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Hansard 3, cxliii, 861 (15 Jul. 1865); Lord Donoughmore to General Eden, 20 Jul. 1855 (DP, H/15/1/77).

<sup>36</sup>Hansard 3, cxliii, 860-2 (15 Jul. 1856), *ibid.*, 1219 (22 Jul. 1856).

<sup>37</sup>Major Bloomfield to Lord Donoughmore, 19 Jul. 1855 (DP, H/15/1/77).

<sup>38</sup>Hansard 3, cxliii, 557 (10 Jul. 1856).

<sup>39</sup>Hansard 3, cxliii, 682-4 (11 Jul. 1856).

<sup>40</sup>Hansard 3, cxliii, 557 (10 Jul. 1856).

<sup>41</sup>Hansard 3, cxliii, 543 (10 Jul. 1856).

On 15 July Dunne continued his line of criticism, declaring that the cause of the incident had been the ‘vacillation’ of the government ‘and its reluctance to do justice, a course of proceeding calculated to injure the military spirit developing itself in Ireland’. He made it clear that he had not minced his words and re-emphasised the charge he was making:

the Department of War was the main cause of what had occurred at Nenagh, for had a little humanity and a little common sense been exercised, the disturbances and discontent that arose would have been avoided’.<sup>42</sup>

Lord Naas, Fitzstephen French and the ‘Independent’ Cork MP John Francis Maguire increased the attack. The latter also declared that ‘[t]he occurrences at Nenagh were solely attributable to the miserable blundering of Government’, while French added that ‘the greatest discontent existed in every Irish militia regiment, in consequence of the way they had been treated and their expectations disappointed’, and used the issue to inquire as to a possible increase in barrack accommodation in Ireland.<sup>43</sup>

Yet, after such exuberant outbursts the issue fizzled out and was not raised again in the Commons, although it got one last hearing in the Lords. On 24 July the Marquis of Clanricarde, commander of the County Galway Militia, who had not addressed the issue previously, rose to inquire as to what punishments were to be issued to the mutineers at Nenagh. He also took the time to testify to the ‘promptitude, energy, and decision which were shown by General Chatterton, the general commanding the district, in putting down the mutiny’.<sup>44</sup>

The interest and passion with which those Irish members responded to the mutiny and the issue of the discharges was not solely due to an Irish patriotic streak, rather, as with most of the British (but more so English) members who responded in a similar fashion during the war, Irish MPs and peers who commented on the issues pertaining to the force did so due to the fact that they held commissions in the Irish Militia regiments. Such men included the Conservative Viscount Bernard, Colonel of the Cork City Artillery Militia, and Lord Arthur Edwin Hill Trevor, Lieutenant-Colonel in the South Down Militia, the Liberal James Molyneux Caulfield, Lieutenant-Colonel in the Tyrone Militia, and Daniel O’Connell II, a Captain in the Kerry Militia, and even the Independent Fulke Greville-Nugent, a Colonel and William Pollard-Urquhart, a Major in the Westmeath Militia.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Hansard 3, cxliii, 860 (15 Jul. 1856).

<sup>43</sup>Hansard 3, cxliii, 861-2 (15 Jul. 1856).

<sup>44</sup>Hansard 3, cxliii, 1347-8 (24 Jul. 1856).

<sup>45</sup>*Hart’s Army List, 1855*, p. 263; *ibid.*, 1856, pp. 349-57.

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### Response of Lord Seaton and the Irish Executive

The mutiny was an isolated affair largely instigated by a combination of local factors. However, subsequent measures initiated by the Irish military and civil authorities not only ensured there was no additional discontent but guaranteed that other regiments, like the North Tipperary Militia, returned to their homes in ‘remarkably good’ temper.<sup>46</sup> In contrast to both Natal and Solon, no mutineers were executed after Nenagh. In the former, had the ringleader been granted clemency that would have implied nothing less than a censure by the Crown on army discipline in Natal.<sup>47</sup> While in the latter, as Bartlett put it, ‘in the eyes of the authorities, [the ringleader James] Daly had to die, not for Ireland, but for India’ – due to the ‘historical resonance of the word “mutiny”’.<sup>48</sup> At Nenagh, by contrast, a surprising degree of astuteness and consequently leniency was demonstrated.

While Irish parliamentarians and the Irish press may have voiced displeasure and concerns regarding the event within their respective spheres, the principal respondent to the entire affair was Lord Seaton, Commander of both Army and Militia in Ireland. Having received the report of the mutiny Seaton’s initial response was to telegraph Major-General Sir James Charles Chatterton, Commander of the Limerick District, and the commanders of the nearest regiments (41st, 47th and 55th Foot) in the garrison towns of Birr and Templemore, with the aim of quelling the riot.<sup>49</sup> Following its successful suppression Seaton recommended to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the 7th Earl of Carlisle, that it was ‘expedient’ that ‘[a] few examples’ be made of the mutineers in order to ‘mark the misconduct of a corps nearly all the men of which were implicated in the atrocious outrages committed’.

However, as David Murphy argues, a considerable amount of leniency was shown.<sup>50</sup> In fact the mutineers were informed of this by Major-General Chatterton when he visited them in Nenagh prison on 1 September 1856.<sup>51</sup> This was because Carlisle felt it apposite to show mercy to the guilty parties, who received a variety of sentences

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<sup>46</sup>Major-General J.C. Chatterton to the Dept. Adj. Gen., Dublin, 1 Sept. 1856 (CSORP, 20793).

<sup>47</sup>Dominy, *Last Outpost*, p. 105.

<sup>48</sup>Bartlett, ‘Rangers Mutiny’, p. 7. Similarly, Draper argues that the authorities were happy to blame Sinn Féin infiltration for the outrage, instead of ‘post-war institutional failings’ within the unit and broader service. Draper, ‘Mutiny under the Sun’, p. 21.

<sup>49</sup>Mil. Sec. to Thomas Lacrom, 10 Jul. 1856 (CSORP, MS 17074).

<sup>50</sup>Murphy, *The Crimean War*, p. 204.

<sup>51</sup>On 1 September Major-General Chatterton visited the mutineers in Nenagh prison and informed them that ‘leniency’ was to be offered them ‘by the executive’. Major-General J.C. Chatterton to the Colonel R.B. Wood, Dublin, 1 Sept. 1856 (CSORP, 20793).

ranging from transportation for life (later commuted) to two years in prison with hard labour, instead of death.<sup>52</sup> This stood in stark contrast to other mutinies, after which men were flogged in front of their units or the leaders were executed for the purposes of setting an example.<sup>53</sup> Seaton, in contrast, followed up what might be termed as his 'stick' approach with a 'carrot'.

Seaton also made considerable efforts to ensure there was no repeat of the events elsewhere in Ireland and that the rest of the regiment was spared.<sup>54</sup> Having decided against disbanding the North Tipperary regiment, which he had initially considered a fitting punishment, Seaton ordered that the unit simply be disembodied like its peer units elsewhere in Ireland and in Britain. This was to be preceded by the addressing of the mutiny issue at the regiment's last parade. This was done in the officer's speech, in order to remove any 'misapprehensions which have been alleged in extenuation of the insubordinate conduct of the corps'.<sup>55</sup> Seaton also issued a new circular to all the militia colonels explicitly explaining 'the amount [of enlistment bounty and pay] which militia men will be entitled to receive whether he accept the indulgence already offered or remain with his corps till authorised to be disembodied'.<sup>56</sup> Finally, Seaton 'strongly recommend[ed]' to the Under-Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Thomas Larcom, that given the 'worn out' state of the men's clothing, the County Lord Lieutenants, who presided over the militia regiments, 'might authorize the gratuity allowance to be expended in the purchase of clothing'. This would be done alongside the payment of all outstanding wages. In Seaton's opinion, this had to be done 'without delay', so that the men 'may be dismissed in a state which will not call forth the compassion of the country'.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>The Lord Lieutenant of Ireland had the 'prerogative of mercy' see R. B. McDowell, *The Irish administration 1801-1914* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), p.52. See also Memorandum for the Military Department to be communicated to the government, 1 Aug. 1856 (CSORP, MS 20790).

<sup>53</sup>In 1762 the 45th Regiment's commander had three mutineers flogged 'for mutinous behaviour in front of the assembled troops, after giving them "the form of a Trial", the Example was absolutely necessary, to Strike a Terror', while after the Connaught Rangers revolt at Solon in 1920, 'it was almost entirely for Indian reasons that James Daly's sentence was confirmed and carried out'. Way, 'Rebellion of the Regulars', p.773; Bartlett, 'Rangers Mutiny', p. 7.

<sup>54</sup>Memorandum from Seaton to Larcom, 20 Jul. 1856 (CSORP, 17074).

<sup>55</sup>Colonel R. B. Wood, to Major-General Sir James Chatterton, Bart., 29 Aug. 1856 (CSORP, 22042).

<sup>56</sup>James Colborne to Larcom, 5 Aug. 1856 (N CSORP, 20791).

<sup>57</sup>Colborne to Larcom (CSORP, 20791).

## THE NENAGH MUTINY OF 7-8 JULY 1856

Taking Roy's argument relative to the Indian Army and applying to the Irish Militia context, the course taken after Nenagh can be seen as an example of the broader modern era 'movement in Western societies towards greater leniency in military punishment'.<sup>58</sup> Equally his argument that moderate punishment both within the Indian Army and the British 'metropolitan armies' was the principal binding agent that facilitated a functional and trustworthy 'professional institution' is equally applicable. Any 'overreaction' in terms of discipline and punishment was counterproductive. The aftermath of the Indian Mutiny or the 'tightening of discipline' in the Bengal Army in 1857, which he argued led to the mutiny, are prime examples.<sup>59</sup> Equally, it is argued here that the leniency shown after Nenagh was made possible by the socio-political state of Ireland at the time. Unlike India in 1920, where tensions remained high due to both the 1919 Amritsar Massacre and the on-going non-cooperation movement, and which ensured that the mutiny leader James Day 'had to die'; Ireland in 1856 was perhaps at its most tranquil during the Union period.<sup>60</sup>

### **The Court of Inquiry**

The popular opinion of the Irish public, the press and the politicians at Westminster in the wake of the mutiny, was that the militiamen had been motivated by a perception of being 'badly treated by the Government'. The men were to be sent 'away without receiving the balance of their bounty' and consequently they were to have 'no means of living or purchasing clothing or implements for work'.<sup>61</sup> In contrast the Court of Inquiry, which assembled in the month following the mutiny, found that the event had in fact been instigated by a combination of factors, not simply a grievance over pay. The first of these was that by July 1856 the uniforms of the men were 'worn & perfectly ragged'. This was partially due to the delay in obtaining new issues and partly due to wear and tear, which ensured that they were reluctant to part with their good clothes, especially the new black trousers. The second was a misguided decision of the regiment's commanding officer, Colonel Maude, to demand that the men return those very trousers in response to rumours 'that they were making away with their [them]' and having removed the stripe from the legs were selling them for a profit. And this at a time when his rank-and-file were of a volatile temperament.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Roy, 'Coercion through Leniency', p. 963.

<sup>59</sup>Roy, 'Coercion through Leniency', p. 963.

<sup>60</sup>I have inferred this in Huddie, *The Crimean War*, p. 55 & 192, while this argument has also been made for the period c.1902-1910 in Pat Walsh, *The Rise and Fall of Imperial Ireland: Redmondism in the context of Britain's conquest of South Africa and its Great War on Germany 1899-1916* (Belfast: Athol Books, 2003), p. 7. See Bartlett, 'Rangers Mutiny', p.6. For Draper's opinion see 'Mutiny under the Sun', pp. 1-2.

<sup>61</sup>Colonel Maude to the Military Secretary, Kilmainham, 7 Jul. 1856 (CSORP, 16431).

<sup>62</sup>Colonel R. B. Wood, to Larcom, 1 Aug. 1856 (CSORP, 20792).

The third, and final factor was the failure of the officers to properly inform the men of the regulations and pay provisions to be afforded them on their dismissal or disembodiment under the regulations of 1 September 1854 and the Circular of 3 July 1856. It was Lord Seaton's opinion that the men of the Tipperary Militia 'who returned to their homes, and who had served 28 days, could claim, and should, upon their dismissal, have received the 10s.'

which they were entitled to and that 'there should have been no doubt whatever in the North Tipperary Militia that these regulations became applicable to men who proceeded to their homes under the authority of the circulars of the 3rd July'.<sup>63</sup>

It was the conclusion of the Court of Inquiry that 'the regimental order directing the general collection of the black trousers, almost simultaneously with the promulgation of the circular of July 3rd was most injudicious, and calculated to induce erroneous impressions as to the its meaning', even if it had been done for the perceived 'good of the public service'.<sup>64</sup> As a result of the inquiries made by the Court, which comprised of its President, Colonel William Irwin (of the Staff), and Members, Brevet Major Hume (55th Foot), Major Armstrong (County Clare Militia), Major Sir Richard De Burgh, Bart., (Limerick County Militia) and Major Warburton (King's County Militia), 'a very unfavourable opinion' of the officers of the regiment was formed. Moreover, it was determined that they were essentially the cause of the mutiny. The court had 'no doubt that the officers rather encouraged the demonstration on the part of the N. Tipperary Militia, suspecting that the Secretary for War had permitted men to return to their homes before the disembodiment of their regiments merely to get rid of their claim for bounty and gratuity allowance'. Dominy and Bartlett make similar arguments relative to causation for the Inniskillings' and Rangers' mutinies. Yet, it should also be noted that the very poor state of their uniforms was also due to a delay in the issue of new clothing owing to a mistake by the 'clothier' hired to make them – a factor beyond the officers' control.<sup>65</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Mutinies and affrays were a long established and regular aspect of British military life, where 'issues such as the non-payment of wages, harsh work conditions, insufficient or poor-quality provisions, or unfair treatment by officers' were frequently the cause.

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<sup>63</sup>Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry, 1 Aug. 1856 (CSORP, 20792, Memorandum No. 2). Emphasis as per the document.

<sup>64</sup>Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry, 1 Aug. 1856 (CSORP, Memo. No. 2).

<sup>65</sup>Dep. Adj. Gen. R.B. Wood, to Larcom, 1 Aug. 1856 (CSORP, 20792); James Colborne to Larcom, 5 Aug. 1856 (CSORP, 20791).

## THE NENAGH MUTINY OF 7-8 JULY 1856

Nenagh was, as Way has argued more generally, no different to ‘many mutinies’ in the modern era, being just one more labour dispute within the military context.<sup>66</sup>

The Nenagh Mutiny shared many characteristics with other mutinies and affrays in the eighteenth, nineteenth and even early twentieth centuries. However, it had its own special attributes. In the context of the early 1920s Bartlett described Irish regiments as having all possessed the ‘combustible material to make a protest,’ and where they only needed a spark. Based on the protests in parliament and the newspapers relative to the government’s disembodiment policy, a similar argument might be made about the Irish Militia in 1856.<sup>67</sup> Like Natal and Solon after it, the right additional factor was also in place at Nenagh to ensure ignition – leadership within the mutineers.

None of the multitude of other affrays and outrages that occurred during the Crimean War across the island of Ireland, and which are documented in the Kilmainham Papers, received any public sympathy. Instead they caused great annoyance to the military authorities, the police and the local populace and those soldiers who were involved were vilified and castigated. In stark contrast to this trend, and more reflective of events that occurred at Natal some thirty-one years later, the Nenagh Mutiny of July 1856 received substantial sympathy from multiple sources. The mutineers were defended and even heralded by a cross-section of the Irish press, while a similar cross-section of militia-affiliated Irish MPs and peers defended their actions in parliament. They used the mutineers’ actions and the incident as a stick to beat the government with over its post-war demobilisation (or disembodiment) policy. Even the military Court of Inquiry found in their favour, laying the blame for the mutiny at the feet of the unit’s officers. While the two most senior men in Ireland – Lords Carlisle and Seaton – showed both tact and leniency towards those involved; and especially to the ten mutineers chosen for punishment.

The Nenagh Mutiny was a part of the Crimean War – the unit involved had been re-embodied in 1855 to provide extra manpower for the war, partly for home defence, but more so for transfers to line regiments. Nenagh also differed little from former and later affrays; such as those in the American colonies in 1763-4, or Natal in 1887 and at Solon in 1920.<sup>68</sup> But it was not solely a response to the Russian war and its events or issues; nor even against the clumsy attempt of the Palmerston government to disembody the Irish Militia. Rather, it was another example of a long-established

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<sup>66</sup>Way, ‘Rebellion of the Regulars’, p. 772.

<sup>67</sup>Bartlett, ‘Rangers Mutiny’, p. 6.

<sup>68</sup>For more on the re-embodiment of the Irish Militia and its purpose and contribution to regular recruitment during the Crimean War see Paul Huddie, ‘British military recruitment in Ireland during the Crimean War, 1854-6’ in *British Journal of Military History*, ii, no. 1 (October, 2015), pp. 34-54.

tradition of soldiers expressing their vexation with equally long-established and recurrent grievances. These were simply given a Crimean veneer, just as Solon has been often been given a patina of Irish Nationalist discontent. In both instances the causes were common and existed within a long history of mutiny in the British Army. However, the combined popular sympathy manifest by the Irish press, parliamentarians (both peers and commoners) and by the Irish political and military executive in 1856 was most certainly uncommon and hence is worthy of note; and renders it necessary to more fully understand this event within the broader history of mutiny in the British Army in the modern period.