

The Irish Military Establishment, 1660-1688

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The post restoration Military Establishment of Ireland dates from February 1661 and consisted of thirty troops of independent horse organized into six county based regiments (Lord Lieutenant's, Munster, Connaught, Ormond's until 1662, Ossery's and the Marshals Regiments of Horse) and sixty six companies of independent foot, mostly under the command of former Parliamentarians with lifetime commissions. This was found to be inadequate, given the dispersed nature of the units and their lack of direct responsibility to the Viceroy.

"His majesty having thought fit to raise in England a
Regiment of twelve hundred foot to be his Guards in Ireland"

Charles II, 23 April 1662

With this royal warrant, the first foot regiment in the post restoration Irish Military Establishment came into being.

The King's Regiment of Guards in the Kingdom of Ireland finds its origins in a Regiment raised out of Connaught by George Cusack in 1653. George Cusack held the garrison of Inishbofin against Parliament, with the support of the Duke of Lorraine, until 1653. Cusack based on his relationship with the Duke of Lorraine was able to take a regiment out of Ireland into French Service at the conclusion of the siege. After a Commonwealth-French Alliance was established in 1656, Cusack took his regiment into Charles Stuart's army in Spanish Flanders where it was merged into the Marquis of Ormond's Regiment, consisting of 700 hundred men and commanded by Colonel George Grace. The regiment fought at the Battle of the Dunes in 1658, an abortive Spanish attempt to relieve the French-English siege of Dunkirk.

Some of the men of the regiment and many of the officers were transferred to England for service in Ireland in 1662. Those that remained in the Spanish Netherlands were sent to Tangier. The Marquis, now First Duke of Ormond, the Viceroy of Ireland while in exile, and now the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, recruited additional soldiers for the regiment in England and granted additional commissions as he saw fit. The Regiment was commanded by his son, the Earl of Arran, later the Second Duke of Ormond, who led the Regiment until 1688. The rolls included a Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel, a Major, nine Captains, twelve Lieutenants, twelve Ensigns, forty sergeants, thirty six corporals, a drum major with twenty four drummers, a piper in the Kings Company and twelve hundred men. The Regiment was organized into twenty troops of horse and eight companies of foot. Clothing and equipment was the same as Colonel Russell's Regiment of Guards. One wonders if the cross on the "taffey" yellow background was the Cross of St George or the Cross of St Patrick, used by the Viceroys of Ireland.



The regimental colors remain a mystery, but some clues exist in the following warrant:

Yellow Taffey and Crimson for 12 Coulours for a Regiment of Foot and that you cause Our badges to be painted and gilded thereon, and that you deliver the same parcels of taffey at the same rate they were furnished for Our Regiment of Foot....and that you deliver the same to Our right and trusty, &c., James Duke of Ormond, Lieutenant of Our Kingdom of Ireland"

24 March 1662

The Regiment embarked for Dublin in May of 1662, where it was headquartered while companies assumed garrison duty throughout Ireland. The Viceroy had a personal bodyguard at the Castle in Dublin in the form of the Company of Battleaxes, comprised of a captain, two sergeants and sixty men. The unit existed from 1662 to 1665. A Troop of the King's Guard of Horse was created in 1662 that existed until 1684. The Regiment of Guards had both a ceremonial function but were called upon from time to time to quell disturbances and perform law enforcement functions throughout Ireland. In 1663 a Plot to capture Dublin Castle and the Lord Lieutenant led by Captain Blood and involving seventy "Presbyterians" was foiled. In 1663 the Regiment of Guards was augmented by an additional two hundred soldiers, some of whom were found to be unsuitable as they were cashiered soldiers from Ireland. The officers that came with this augmentation were, at the insistence of Ormond, Irish, and not English. By 1663 financing the military establishment of Ireland was already an issue and there were no disbandment of units because the Crown could not afford to pay the soldiers arrears in pay. In 1666, the garrison of Carrickfergus mutinied taking control of the castle and the town. The Earl of Arran and four companies of Guards sailed to Carrickfergus and put down the uprising in two days. The one hundred and ten mutineers were court-martialed and the two companies were disbanded.

The Establishment was reorganized in 1672 with the five existing regiments of Horse and the troop of Life Guards and five regiments of foot (Massie's, Howth's, Power's, Gore's and Lord Lieutenant's), and the Guards. Little or nothing changed in terms of the dispersed nature of the companies and troops and the consequent lack of affiliation.

Powers Regiment served in France from 1672-74. Two companies of the Guards served as marines in the abortive amphibious landing turned sea battle at Textel in 1673. There were additional twenty five companies of soldiers sent to join the Guards in 1674. Pay was always months if not years in arrears and most of the officers viewed military service as a part time position. Soldiers were given to furtively taking up a trade to survive and by 1676 this was an accepted practice. Command of the Guards went to Lord Ossory in 1674.

In 1684, renewed interest in the Irish military situation led to a reestablishment and organization of the Irish Military Establishment under Arthur, Lord Forbes, Earl of Granard and the Marshal of Ireland. There were two regiments of horse (Ormond's and Arran's) and a Troop of Life Guards and seven regiments of foot (Ormond's, Granard's, Montjoy's, Newcomen's, King's and Fairfax's) were organized. The Guards continued as one of the Regiments of Foot. That same year, Granard's Regiment was sent to Ulster to disarm potential rebels. In 1685, Granard's Regiment was sent to England in response to Monmouth's Rebellion and returned to Ireland shortly thereafter.

As a result of the 1685 purging of Protestants from the Military Establishment of Ireland by the Earl of Tyrone, Arran's Regiment of Horse became Talbot's Regiment of Horse and Ormond's Regiment of Foot went to Justin Mac Carthy. Hamilton's Regiment of Dragoons was established in 1685. Lord Forbes was replaced by Tyrconnel as commander of the Military Establishment and gave command of his Regiment to his son, Arthur Forbes, the second Earl of Granard, who was able to keep a relatively high proportion of Protestants in his regiment. By 1686 of the 7,485 soldiers, 5,043 were Catholics and of the 406 officers, 166 were Catholics, with Protestant numbers declining steadily until 1688. MacElligot's Regiment of Foot was formed in 1688.

In 1688, King James II had MacElligot's Regiment of Foot, A Battalion of the Guards Regiment and Granard's Regiment of Foot transferred to England in preparation for a possible Dutch invasion. Tyrconnel stood up new regiments to replace those sent to England. Of those regiments sent to England, all were disbanded with the exception of Granard's which continued on the English establishment as the 18th regiment of Foot, the Royal Irish Regiment. Granard's Regiment wore red coats with blue facings and had a red Cross of St Patrick on a white field for their colors. The disbanded Catholic soldiers were to be sent to Austria but many found their way into the service of France. Lord Ossory, by 1688 the 2nd Duke of Ormond, went over to William III and command of the Guards went to William Dorrington. Those Regiments that remained in Ireland in 1688 were effectively purged of Protestants and fought for King James II in the War of Three Kings. When given the chance after the siege of Limerick to stay in Ireland or go into British service, all but seven of the fourteen hundred soldiers of the Royal Regiment of Foot Guards followed General Dorrington into French Service.

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