

Connaught Rangers Mutiny

"We'll soldier no more for England" was the rallying cry of one of the Connaught Rangers when he and other Irish members of the English army sought in 1920 to protest the repressive rule of England in Ireland. The members of this elite fighting force stationed in Punjab, India gave a clear signal to the English government that, though far away from Ireland and sworn soldiers of the king, they opposed England's presence in Ireland.

The Connaught Rangers, nicknamed "The Devil's Own," was formed in 1881 when the 88th Regiment of Foot and the 94th Regiment of Foot were merged. Its roots went back to 1793 when England wanted to station a garrison in Galway to thwart any incursions from Napoleonic France from the west. The Regiment bore on its colors and appointments a harp and crown with the motto *Quis Separabit (Who Shall Divide Us)*. The Rangers fought with distinction in Egypt, India, South America, the Crimea, South Africa, France, the Boer Wars, Mesopotamia, Gallipoli and World War I, a list of wars that traces colonial England's ambitions all over the world. The Rangers never lost their Irishness, as the Mutiny illustrates, even sewing shamrocks on uniform sleeves and devising unofficial green flags.



One influence on the Mutiny that cannot be overemphasized was the stationing of the Black and Tans on Irish soil. The English assigned irregular forces, commonly called the Black and Tans, to be its presence in Ireland in 1920. Their infamy as law enforcers was condemned even by Lloyd George: "In all our annals there has been nothing to parallel this record of organized savagery." The news of Black and Tan atrocities reached the Irish soldiers overseas. One Ranger involved in the Mutiny even reported being personally harassed at a hurling match when he was home on leave. The Rangers read in letters from home about the random shooting of civilians, the elderly being thrown out of

their homes, and harassment intended to provoke a response that would be violently put down. The Rangers had to act.

Act they did. On June 27, 1920, Rangers Christopher Sweeney, Patrick Gogarty, William Daly, Joseph Hewes and Stephen Lally volunteered for self-imprisonment in the guardhouse after taking down the Union Jack flag at the Wellington Barracks in Jullundur and replacing it with the flag of the Irish Republic. Joseph Hewes succinctly stated the group's intentions: ***We'll soldier no more for England.*** It was 120 degrees at Jullundur that day, almost as hot as the temper of the Rangers.

When called to muster the next day, Tommy Moran of Athlone stepped forward and said, "Sergeant, I want to be put in the guardhouse with the other five men who have gone there for Ireland's cause." The two men assigned to escort Moran refused the order in support of the men in the guardhouse. When Major Payne (a Corkman) failed to convince Moran to follow orders, Moran was escorted to the guardhouse and twenty-nine of his mates followed him. A soldier on guard duty joined them. The prisoners began singing rebel songs, including "The Boys of Wexford" and "The Wearin' O' the Green" and shouting "Up the Republic!"

The number of protestors continued to grow as Rangers learned of the resistance. When "B" Company, returning from the rifle range, heard the rebel songs, they stopped, without orders, to ask about the tumult. Showing concern for the men whom he commanded, Colonel Deacon, the Commanding Officer who was with the Connaught Rangers for thirty-three years, sat "B" company on the steps of the guardhouse and called out the thirty-five

in the guardhouse for a lecture. He reminded the Rangers of their oath and the seriousness of disobedience while on active duty. Indeed, Irish soldiers were generally loyal to their oaths. A notable example of that loyalty occurred in WWI when Irish prisoners of war in German camps rejected Roger Casement's recruitment efforts. Casement, an important name in Irish Republican history, had aimed to organize an Irish company within the German Army to fight against England. Deacon reminded the soldiers of their illustrious history with Wellington on the Peninsula and in the Crimea and South Africa. Many of the mutineers had served with Deacon in France and Flanders. Deacon pleaded with the men to return to their barracks and promised that he would forward their complaints about atrocities in Ireland to London.

Attributed to Joseph Hewes was this eloquent response to Colonel Deacon: "Colonel, all the honors on the Connaught's flag were for England. Not a one of them was for poor old Ireland. But there's going to be one added today, and it'll be the greatest honor of them all." The thirty-five marched smartly back to the guardhouse.

Inside the guardhouse, "B" and "C" companies collaborated on a leadership structure. The Rangers would follow no orders except from its own leadership but would maintain order and discipline as was customary with the Connaught Rangers. Years later, the Rangers were commended by the last man to serve as a Lieutenant Colonel with the Connaught Rangers, H.F.N. Jourdan: "... to the credit of the men who refused service, they never attempted to misuse their arms in any way, or to do otherwise than to parade."

shortly before 2.30 p.m. on December 7th, had not seen the enlarged map of the district, served out to all commanding officers of the infantry, and did not know of the existence of the names which had been given to the various features in and in front of the British position. There was therefore little use in reporting bodies of the enemy on or near any part of the hostile front.

The behaviour of the officers, as has been said, in the line was beyond all praise, and the devotion of the men to the regiment exceedingly fine. Only when the survivors attempted to get free from the masses of Bulgarian infantry did they retire from the line. When it is taken into consideration that not one officer, excepting the commanding officer and the adjutant, had had more than one and a half years' service, their performance is gallant beyond all praise. The signallers and orderlies at battalion head-quarters did not leave their station until ordered to do so. Even then the enemy were pressing on and were on an eminence overlooking the bivouac. The final assault was carried out by masses of Bulgarian infantry, and many thousands of men were launched against B and C Companies alone.

When the war came to an end, and a British representative proceeded by aeroplane to Sofia, one of the first questions King Boris asked was about the 5th Battalion The Connaught Rangers. Another testimony from a gallant enemy to the stand made by the Rangers on December 6th and 7th is this: A Bulgarian officer, who came to London after the war, declared that when the men of his regiment were ordered to bury their dead and decorate the graves of their fallen, they declared that they would prefer first to decorate the graves of the gallant regiment (mentioning the 5th Battalion) which had stood and bravely barred the way so long to victory.

A War Office communiqué stated:—"After violent attacks of the enemy in overwhelming numbers, the 10th Division, with the help of reinforcements, succeeded in retiring to a strong position from Lake Doiran westwards towards the Vardar Valley in connexion with Allied Divisions. It is reported that they fought well against the heaviest odds, and it was largely due to the gallantry of the troops, especially the Munsters, Dublins, and Connaught Rangers, that the withdrawal was successfully accomplished. Our casualties numbered about 1,300."

Correspondents at that time agree that the British contingent was specially marked for attack by the German-Bulgarian army. The *Petit Parisien* published the following telegram: "The eventuality which my last telegrams foreshadowed took place yesterday, when the Bulgarians, in strong force, and probably supported by German artillery, made a very violent attack on the British left wing in the sector extending from Rabrovo

The Ranger's leadership cooperated with a colonel sent to Jullundur to negotiate a bloodless resolution. Surrounded by two battalions of infantry, a company of machine gunners, and a battery of artillery, the Rangers relinquished their weapons in compliance with the negotiated plan and the rebel leadership marched the mutineers to a camp set up two miles from the base camp.



A reader might question why the English officer corps was lenient to mutineers. An answer may lie in the Easter Rising of 1916 when England's execution of the leaders of the Rising resulted in the radicalization of a previously indifferent Irish majority. Only three years after the Rising in Dublin, the English government was again taught the lesson of the value of minimum response at Amristar in India in 1919. A local festival, nonpolitical, drew tens of thousands of Indians in spite of the English prohibition of large gatherings in its effort to curb rebellious groups. Showing no concern for civilian lives, the general in command of the English forces, mostly Indian, ordered his men to fire into the crowd. The massacre at Amristar took 300 lives and injured 1200 civilians. The ensuing outcry from Indian leaders led to the commanding officer, Brigadier-General Reginald E.H. Dyer, being made the scapegoat, pushing him into retirement. English officers at Jullundur may have learned a lesson about restraint from Dublin and Amristar.

Not all of the mutinous behavior took place at the Wellington Barracks at Jullundur; at the camp at Solan the inevitability that someone would die during this mutiny was realized. Privates Kelly and Keegan, eager to spread the word of the Mutiny, went to the encampment at Solan and sought out Private James Daly (*pictured on right*) whom they knew to be politically conscious of Republican issues and the Republican movement. He would become the most well known of the mutineers because he was the only mutineer who was executed. On July 30, Daly paraded seventy men—in good order—to the officers' mess to deliver this message: ***England out of Ireland*** and release privates Kelly and Keegan. The Rangers at Solan now followed Daly as their leader and they raised the tricolor over the barracks. Rumors of a massacre at Jullundur which reached Solan led to an assault by the Rangers on the armory to obtain weapons. Two of the mutineers were killed by guards at the armory, deaths attributed to Daly's leadership for which he was held accountable. The surviving twenty-eight rebels were arrested and sent to prison to join the fifty from Jullundur. The Jullundur part of the Mutiny was ended when, in an early morning raid, English forces separated the leadership from the group, arrested the leaders and imprisoned them in Dagshai jail with the Solan prisoners. The other Rangers returned to duty.

Seventy-eight of the mutineers were brought to trial in August 1920. Joseph Hewes and Joseph Daly refused to recognize the jurisdiction of the court over them. Of the Jullundur mutineers, five were sentenced to execution. Those who attacked the armory at Solan were given the death penalty. Subsequently, the Commander-in-Chief India reduced all sentences, except for Jim Daly's death penalty. He was held responsible for the deaths of the two Rangers assaulting the armory at Solan and was executed.

Daly is remembered in the "Ballad of the Mutiny of 'The Devil's Own'" written by one of the mutineers, "Forty" Walsh, while in prison:

He was like a living angel, when walking out to die,

This gallant Irish martyr, no tear did dim his eye.

Although he died in Dagshai jail, 'twas for a noble deed,

So I hope you'll pray for Daly from the County of Westmeath.

The imprisoned Connaught Rangers continued to defy orders. Punishments included separation to various prisons and solitary confinement with bread and tea meals. Finally, they were all released in an amnesty at the birth of the Irish Free State in 1922. At the same time the Connaught Rangers and all Irish regiments, except those from the North, were disbanded.

The Connaught Rangers who mutinied against the most powerful nation in the world are remembered in Ireland in a monument at Glasnevin Cemetery and in a stained glass window in Galway Cathedral. As "Forty" Walsh has put it:

And when Ireland gets her freedom, we may go safely home,

But we'll ne'er forget that gallant crowd they call "The Devil's Own."

(written by Jack Hallissey)

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