

Napoleon's Irish Legion

By Capt. Frank Forde, M.Mar.

Morlaix, Brittany, heard many Irish accents in the early years of the 19th century for it was there that Napoleon's Irish Legion was formed in November 1803. This resulted from representations to Bonaparte by prominent Irish exiles in Paris who requested that an Irish corps be raised for service in the army that General Augereau was assembling for the projected invasion of Ireland. Appointed to command the Legion was Adjutant-General Bernard MacSheedy, born Dublin 1774. As a twenty year-old student at the Irish College, Paris, he had joined the French Army and taken part in the expedition to Egypt in 1798.

To Morlaix flocked men who had old scores to settle with the British; some were officers of the Irish Brigade regiments which had served in France from the surrender of Limerick in 1691 until the Revolution caused their disbandment. Others, like MacSheedy, were students completing in France the education denied them in Ireland by the Penal Laws. A large proportion were men who had escaped to France after the collapse of the 1798 Rebellion. Amongst the latter was Myles Burne who in his "Memoirs" has recorded the history of the Legion from its formation to disbandment in 1815. Born in Monaseed, Co. Wexford, in 1780 he became a member of the United Irishmen, fought at Enniscorthy, Arklow, New Ross and Vinegar Hill and moved into the Wicklow Mountains with Michael Dwyer when the insurgents were defeated in Wexford. After the failure of Robert Emmet's Rising in 1803 he escaped to France in an American ship, landing at Bordeaux. From there he travelled to Paris and was one of the first officers commissioned into the Irish Legion, and has recorded how on arrival at Morlaix he "messed in the Hotel de France where we had an excellent table, and in the best part of the town, near the bridge on the quay".

Throughout the early months of 1804 men continued to arrive at Morlaix and the Legion trained and prepared them for action in Ireland. Two officers, Captains Tennant and William Corbet, went to Paris in March 1804 and were present when Napoleon was proclaimed "Emperor of the French" by the Senate. A duel between Captain Thomas Corbet (brother of William) and Captain Sweeny resulted in the death of the latter and in the inquiry that followed Adjutant-General MacSheedy lost command of the Legion.

In August 1805 Napoleon, having failed to obtain the preliminary sea victory necessary for the invasion of England, turned his attention towards Austria and marched his army eastwards. He defeated the Austrians and Russians at Austerlitz in December 1805 and went on to defeat the Prussians at Jena in 1806. Now the Irish Legion was ordered to join him in Berlin. Passing through Verdun the Legion band struck up "St. Patrick's Day", for the fortress there was known to be an English prisoner-of-war camp.

They halted on the Rhine at Mainz and there 1,500 Polish prisoners, formerly in the Prussian Army, enlisted in the Legion. Amongst them were many Irishmen, like Sergeant-Major Maloney, wounded and captured at Castlebar in 1798 and then sold as a slave to the King of Prussia for work in his coal mines. Captain Myles Byrne was delighted to welcome fellow Wexfordmen Dalton, Cane, Doyle and O'Brien. Veterans of the Rising from Kildare were Privates Gunning and Foster.

In June 1807 the Legion transferred to Antwerp, then a major French naval port, and there witnessed the launching of the warships *Austerlitz*, *Jena* and *Friedland*. That September they moved to the Dutch island of Walcheren and encamped near Flushing. But fever swept the camp, resulting in much suffering and several deaths. Before the end of the year the 800 strong 3rd Battalion under Captain Louis de Lacy departed for Spain from where a French army had invaded Portugal.

De Lacy had an unusual background for an Irish Legion officer. Born near Gibraltar in 1775, the son of Colonel Patrick de Lacy of the Regiment of Ultonia (Ulster), he was commissioned into his father's unit. Whilst serving in the Canary Islands in 1795 he had a duel with the Governor of the colony in which the latter was seriously wounded. De Lacy was court-martialled, dismissed the army and

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imprisoned. On release he left Spain and joined the French Army and when the Irish Legion was formed he transferred to it.

The 3rd Battalion spent the early months of 1808 near Madrid until May when the Spanish people revolted against the French who withdrew north behind the Elbro river. As the Legion left Madrid, Captain de Lacy, disguised as a girl, deserted to the nearest Spanish position. He was recommissioned and posted to the Burgos Regiment which he led with such success that by 1812 he was in command of the 10,000 strong Army of Galicia. The return of King Ferdinand VII saw him involved in an anti-royalist plot for which he faced a firing squad in 1816. Four years later the King pardoned him posthumously and he was awarded the title "Duke of Ultonia" and reburied with great ceremony alongside his kinsman Count Francis de Lacy.

The French Army in Spain now needed men, and in July 1808 the Legion's 2nd Battalion at Flushing was ordered to the Peninsula. Under the command of Captain Fitzhenry it marched through France and over the Pyrenees and at Pamplona in September it absorbed the by now understrength 3rd Battalion. Early in 1809 the Irish Battalion transferred to Burgos where its duties included providing guards for the mail service between the Pyrenees and the city, and mounting expeditions into the Austurian mountains in pursuit of guerrillas. This caused some heart searching amongst those who themselves had been hunted through the Wicklow Mountains after the '98 Rebellion, and Myles Byrne has recalled in his "Memoirs" a conversation with a Spanish priest on whom he was billeted who compared the suffering of Ireland with Spain.

On 17th January Napoleon passed through Burgos and inspected a Legion guard under Sergeant Mooney, looking very smart in their green uniforms with yellow facings. He ordered there the expansion of the Legion to four battalions and a depot. St. Patrick's Day was celebrated in traditional style, and at the same time the Hibernia Regiment of the Spanish Army was honouring the Saint a few miles away. There is no record that the two units ever met in battle.

In June it was announced that Colonel Daniel O'Meara would command the expanded Legion which was now renamed the Irish Regiment ("Regiment Irlandais"). The 1st Battalion was still at Flushing and about to receive fire for the first time from an English force under General Sir David Dundas which landed on Walcheren and besieged the town. The investment was completed when Commandant William Lawless was ordered there on 10th July to take command of the Battalion. Procuring a small boat he rowed past the enemy fleet, landed and fought until the town surrendered, and though suffering a wound to the head, went into hiding with the precious Eagle Standard which Napoleon himself had presented to the Regiment. For two months he and Captain Terence O'Reilly evaded the enemy and finally after dark escaped across the Scheldt in a fisherman's boat and handed over the Eagle to Marshal Bernadotte who promoted Lawless to Lieut.-Colonel and awarded the Legion of Honour to him and O'Reilly. (O'Reilly's sword, with the inscription "Flessingue", is on display in the National Museum, Dublin.)

Other officers who escaped from Flushing were Captains William Barker, P. McCann and William Dowdall, the latter two to die of wounds at Ghent. Barker, an officer in the Regiment of Walsh under the Ancient Regime, had returned to his native Wexford at the time of the French Revolution and there joined the United Irishmen. He fought throughout the Wexford campaign of 1789, losing an arm at Vinegar Hill, and escaped to France where he joined the Irish Legion. He died there peacefully in 1811.

The 1st Battalion was reformed at the depot, now established at Landau, on the Rhine. To there the recruiting officer, Captain Markey, sent all the Irishmen he could find, including many who were languishing in prison camps having been captured whilst serving with British regiments in the Peninsula.

The 3rd Battalion, under Commandant Mahony, after forming at the depot, was order to Spain and it reached Burgos in March 1810. There it joined the 2nd Battalion in General Thomiere's 2nd Brigade, 2nd

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Division (Solignac) of Marshal Junot's VIII Corps. Early in April, Colonel O'Meara arrived from Landau to command the two battalions in the forthcoming campaign which the General Officer Commanding, Marshal Massena, hoped would result in driving the English from Portugal. In the opening move Junot besieged Astorga and by 21st April his artillery had made a breach in the town walls. This was rushed and held by the 2nd Battalion's Light Company under Captain John Allen who was awarded the Legion of Honour for his bravery. Dublin-born, he was the proprietor of a drapery business at College Green, Dublin, when arrested in February 1798 and charged with high treason. He was held in the Tower of London until his trial when he was discharged for lack of evidence. He resumed his United Irish activities and after the failure of the 1803 Rising escaped to France and joined the Irish Legion. He survived the Napoleonic Wars and died at Caen in 1855.

The next important battle for the Irish was at Almeida in June where the 2nd Battalion gained some important ground near Fort Conception. For his gallantry there, Kildare-born Captain Hugh Ware was promoted to command the 4th Battalion then forming at Landau. The fall of Almeida, after its magazine exploded, resulted in Wellington retreating into Portugal, and the two armies had their next meeting at Busaco on 27th September 1810.

Busaco ridge was ten miles long and steep-fronted, posing a formidable obstacle to the advancing French. Along its crest Wellington's men, including the 88th Connaught Rangers, waited the coming attack with confidence. On the plain below the French advanced led by Renier's II Corps and the main assault was planned for dawn on 27th September. Before the battle began the Brigade commander made an eloquent speech to the Irish Regiment's officers "reminding them of the wrongs of Ireland and called to their recollection Fontenoy."

French attempts to storm the ridge failed and it fell to Junot's Corps, in reserve all day, to cause the Anglo-Portuguese army to retreat by outflanking them north of the ridge. To this day the Connaught Rangers Old Comrades Association (the Regiment was disbanded in 1922) exchange greetings on the anniversary of Busaco with the Portuguese 8th Regiment who stood shoulder to shoulder with them in the bitter fighting.

Wellington now retreated nearer to Lisbon and took up positions in the Lines of Torres Vedras, heavily fortified earthworks which his designers had constructed over the past year. The French followed and both armies settled down among the hills and rocks for the winter. The Irish Regiment has recorded that "it was within cannon shot of the enemy" for several months and suffered greatly from lack of food as the French supply system was inadequate. The British were much better off, receiving food and forage by sea through Lisbon, whereas the French lines of communication right back to the Pyrenees were harassed by Spanish guerrillas.

In February 1811 the Irish 3rd Battalion, decimated by sickness and death, was inactivated and the officers returned to the depot at Landau, the men transferring to the 2nd Battalion. Early in March the French decided to withdraw from Portugal and during the retreat Captain Allen was wounded and captured by the Spanish and imprisoned at Cadiz. On arrival at the Spanish frontier the 2nd Battalion was ordered to join the garrison of Ciudad Rodrigo. There, for the first time in months, they tasted fresh bread.

A peaceful month was spent in the fortress, the pursuing English being busily engaged in besieging nearby Almeida. The French forces were now reorganised by their new commander, Marshal Marmont, who replaced Massena, and the Irish Battalion transferred to the 6th Division (General Brenier). It consisted of the 22nd Infantry, 65th Infantry, 17th Light and Hanover Legion.

Soon they were marching to fight again, south towards the frontier fortress of Badajoz besieged by Wellington. On the approach of Marmont the English raised the siege and the 2nd Battalion helped to restock the fortress and repair the damaged walls. They then withdrew into the mountains of Estramadura where the hot summer months were spent, and in August the order was received to change the title to 3rd Foreign Regiment (Irish) ("3^{eme} Regiment Etranger (Irlandais)"). October

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found the Irish at Placentia where on the 13th they successfully beat off an enemy cavalry charge for which they were mentioned in Divisional Orders:

"Yesterday, when the call to arms was made of the companies d'elite of the garrison, the General of Division observed that those of the Irish Battalion particularly distinguished themselves by their bravery and zeal, and by their promptitude and exactness in repairing to the point they were ordered to. He testifies to them his satisfaction at their conduct.

BRENIER,
General of Division."

In November, Captain Augustine Dillon took over command of the Battalion. He was the son of General Theobald Dillon killed by rebel soldiers at Lille in 1792.

The last battle of the Irish in Spain occurred early in December when a patrol under Lieutenant Maloney was ambushed by guerrillas in the mountains. They beat off the attacks and returned safely to Placentia. Maloney had fought under General Humbert in 1798, was wounded and captured and sold into slavery to Prussia. Impressed into the Prussian Army, he was captured by the French at Jena, and found his way into the Irish Regiment.

Towards the end of December orders were received to disband the 2nd Battalion, the officers were to return to the depot, now in Holland, and the men to transfer to 4th Foreign Regiment. In February 1812, William Lawless was appointed Colonel of the Irish Foreign Regiment and he rebuilt the unit in Holland. The 1st Battalion was at a Dutch town called Goree, under Commandant Tennant. 2nd Battalion was reforming under Commandant Hayne, and when ready moved to Bergen-op-Zoom. 3rd Battalion, Commandant Ware, was at Willemstaat and the 4th Battalion and Depot were at Bois-le-Duc (later renamed s-Hertogensbosch).

Two officers, Ensigns Keller and Ryan, reached the Depot after escaping from England. The former had been a prisoner since his capture in Portugal, and Ryan had gone into captivity after the fall of Flushing in 1809. All through the summer of 1812, as Napoleon led the Grand Army deep into Russia, the Irish Foreign Regiment trained and built up its strength amidst the canals and pleasant countryside of Holland.

Early in 1813 the survivors of the Moscow disaster streamed back into Germany, and Napoleon returned to France to raise new forces and continue the war. Accordingly, the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Regiment were ordered east to Madgeburg. Then 1st, under Commandant Tennant left Goree on 1st February, and the 2nd, under Commandant Ware, marched from Bergen-op-Zoom, via Breda, Tilburg, Bois-le-Duc, Grave and Nijmegen, joining up with the 1st Battalion at Osnabruck. It was the first time since they separated at Flushing in 1808 that the two battalions were together. Colonel Lawless now assumed command and led them through Minden, Hanover and Brunswick to Madgeburg, which they reached on 28th February. They paraded next day behind their band before General Lauriston, to whose V Corps they were assigned.

The first task he gave them was to guard the Elbe crossings, and three days later found them in the vicinity of Stendal where they had their first clash with the enemy. Moving north into the Luneburg Plain the Irish captured Uelzen and Luneburg on 25th April and remained to garrison the latter town. A month later, after a strenuous march through the Saxon countryside, they fought at Wurzen. They were in the 2nd Division (General Puthod) of V Corps (Lauriston), and on the morning of 21st May,

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marching behind their fife and drum band, they reached the battle area to find that action had started. The French were victorious and the Irish Regiment added to its glory by capturing the town.

The grenadier company, under Captain Myles Byrne, drove the Cossacks out of the Chateau, and Marshal Ney, who was passing, requisitioned it as his billet for the night. The Irish provided sentinels as the 'bravest of the brave' slept. The following day there was more fighting, and finally the enemy broke off and withdrew into Silesia. The French followed as far as the Neisse River where the Regiment spent several days helping to rebuild destroyed bridges.

At Lignitz on 26th May, Marshal Ney watched the Irish in action and reprimanded Sergeant Costello for not falling back to the rallying point immediately the trumpet sounded. The sergeant explained that a Cossack had fired twice at him and he had waited to kill the man before withdrawing. "Did you?" asked the Marshal. "I hope so," said Costello, "for I saw him fall from his horse." "A la bonne heure," replied the Prince of the Moscow.

The Irish Regiment was battling towards Breslau on 4th June when the armistice came into effect and they moved into billets at Goldberg. At a ceremony on 18th June, Commandants Tennant and Ware, Captains Byrne, St. Leger, Parrot and Lieutenant Osmond were made Knights of the Legion of Honour by Napoleon. The welcome respite gave the French an opportunity for some badly needed training in an attempt to improve the overall quality of the army, which now consisted of hastily raised levies, some only 17 years old. Particular emphasis was given to defence against cavalry, and daily throughout July and August the Irish practised forming square, the most effective method of protection against hostile horsemen.

On 10th August Puthod's Division held a fete in honour of Napoleon, and 10,000 men assembled for sports, games and drill. At sunset the Emperor's health was drunk in unison.

Hostilities resumed six days later, Austria and Sweden now joined the Coalition against France. The Irish, still in V Corps, came under the command of Marshal MacDonald; and at Lowenberg on 19th August gave a magnificent display of steadiness. At daylight, as thousands of Prussian horsemen appeared before them, the Irish formed square, front ranks kneeling down with musket butts on the ground, rear ranks standing behind them. They felt greatly honoured when the Brigade Commander, General Vachereau, and his staff choose to come within their square rather than those formed by the other regiments of the Brigade, the 134th and 143rd Line. Mass charges by cavalry in great force failed to break the squares and the enemy then brought up batteries of artillery which fired point blank into the Irish ranks causing enormous casualties. Colonel Lawless had his horse shot from under him.

The Regiment held form and as openings occurred men filled them, thus presenting an unbroken front to the horsemen. General Lauriston, seeing the dangerous position the Irish were in, ordered them to fall back to a nearby wood. They executed this command with great skill, the square retreating in a body, halting and firing every two minutes until the wood was reached. There, a roll call disclosed they had suffered 300 casualties with Commandant Tennant, Captain Evans, Lieutenants Osmond and McAuley dead. The wounded included Sergeant Costello who had an arm blown off.

Napoleon now appeared at Lowenberg and ordered a counterattack against the enemy who were bombarding the town. On horseback at the river crossing, he watched the Irish moving over to attack. A few minutes later Colonel Lawless was carried back by six grenadiers on a door with his leg shattered by a cannon ball. Napoleon sent his chief surgeon, Baron Larrey, to perform the amputation. It was a painful end to the military career of a man who as Professor of Anatomy in the College of Surgeons, Dublin, had followed his friend, Lord Edward Fitzgerald into the United Irishmen. He survived his wounds, returned to Paris and died there in 1824.

Command of the Irish now passed to Colonel Hugh Ware, a native of Co. Kildare, and also an United Irishman. After the '98 Rebellion he was captured and imprisoned but released in 1803 on condition

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of perpetual banishment. The two battalion commanders were Lieut.-Colonels Myles Byrne and Edmund St. Leger.

At Goldberg on 23rd August the Irish saw stiff fighting, capturing an important hill and during the battle General Vachereau was killed. As a result of reverses suffered by MacDonald further to the east, the 2nd Division was ordered back to Lowenberg. But torrential rain now fell, turning the tracks into quagmires, and when the 6,000-strong division reached the Border(sic) they found all the bridges had been swept away. On the west bank Westphalian engineers were waiting for the flood to subside before building new ones.

The French were trapped, and on 29th August the end came as 40,000 Russians launched themselves against the small bridgehead. For eight hours the battle raged, the Irish holding a village on the left flank, and at 16:30 when the last cartridge was fired the order came to break out. Only 150 from the Division succeeded in getting across to Lowenberg, and of these 37 came from the Irish Regiment, who disciplined to the end brought their Eagle with them. The surviving officers were Colonel Hugh Ware, Lieut.-Colonel Myles Byrne, Captain St. Leger and Lieutenant Lynch.

The small band was ordered back to the Depot in Holland, and at Bautzen on 4th September they were inspected by Napoleon who thanked them for saving the Eagle. The sick and wounded were collected as they passed through Leipzig and Dresden, Colonel Lawless being found in the former place. There were further clashes with Cossacks in the Hartz Mountains and finally in early October they reached Bois-le-Duc. Major Mahony commanding the Depot gave a dinner in their honour. In Holland the 1st and 2nd Battalions were reformed and towards the end of 1813 they transferred to Antwerp where the 3rd Battalion joined them. At the same time the Depot moved to Lille.

Antwerp was soon besieged by an English force under General Graham who was reinforced in the New Year by the arrival of a Swedish Army under the former French Marshal Bernadotte. It was not the first time the famous soldier had met Irish fighting men; as a twenty-year-old Marine Sergeant, Jean Bernadotte, according to one account, was wounded and captured at Cuddalore, India, on 25th June, 1783, by the Bengal European Battalion which later became the Royal Munster Fusiliers. (It is a matter of controversy whether or not Bernadotte, who was a grenadier in his regiment, the Royal la Marine in 1782, a corporal in June '84 and a sergeant in August, ever, in fact, served in India.)

All attempts to take Antwerp failed, and on 18th April news of the restoration of King Louis XVIII was received and the garrison accepted the White Cockade. On 4th May they marched out for France, arriving at the Depot at Lille on 16th May. Towards the end of 1814 the Irish Regiment transferred to Montreuil-sur-Mer (near Boulogne) and soon the English influence upon the restored Bourbons was suspected, as preference in promotions went to non-Irish officers.

Napoleon escaped from Elba in February 1815 and in the Place d'Armee at Montreuil on 24th May, the Irish declared publicly for the Emperor. They remained on coastal defence duties during the 100 Days, being renamed the 7th (Irish) Foreign Regiment in June. The defeat at Waterloo and the return of King Louis marked the end of the unit, and on 29th September 1815 at Montreuil-sur-Mer it was disbanded. Myles Byrne went on Half-Pay but was recalled to active service in 1828 and commanded a battalion of the 56th Infantry Regiment in Greece during the war with Turkey. He retired with the rank of Colonel in 1835 and wrote his "Memoirs", the best account available of the history of the Irish Legion.

John Mitchell was in Paris at a Fenian Convention in 1860 and met him walking along the Champs Elysee. He recorded a vivid description of the former United Irishman: "He has marched over half of Europe and stood often at the head of his Regiment on the rough edge of battles; served in Spain, Germany, Greece and at Flushing. Other and earlier memories cloud at times his clear grey eyes and through and beyond the battle-smoke and thunder of Napoleon's fields, he has a vision of the pikemen of New Ross and hears the fierce hurrah on Oulart Hill."

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He died in Paris in 1862.

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NAPOLEON'S IRISH LEGION, 1803-15

THE HISTORICAL RECORD

Introduced and translated by Lieut.-Col. Brian Clark

For the average reader, the principal source of information on Napoleon's Irish Legion has been the *Memoirs of Miles Byrne*, the former United Irishman who served in the legion from start to finish and who later achieved the rank of chef de bataillon in the French army. There are several references to the legion and some of its personnel in *The Irish Sword* and elsewhere but so far no full account of it has appeared in English. Now with the assistance of my friend Patrick O'Callaghan, a chef de bataillon in the modern French army, the official record of the legion's service has been made available and is here published in translation by permission of le Général du Corps d'Armée Guinard, directeur du service historique, château de Vincennes, France. I would like to acknowledge the assistance rendered by the French Embassy, Dublin, and Mr. P. F. Mahony in the preparation of this article.

The surviving regiments of the Irish Brigade lost their distinctive Irish identity on being fully absorbed into the French army in 1791. (Several Irish officers appear to have continued to serve in these regiments, however; Miles Byrne relates that he attended a dinner-party at Burgos, Spain, on St. Patrick's Day 1809, where the guests included "Colonel (Charles) O'Neill, then a captain in the 47th Regiment, formerly Walsh's, which had been commanded by his father, General (John) O'Neill; his battalion *had still several officers who had served in the (Irish) brigades.*") Before long, however, the advantages of raising and maintaining foreign units in the French revolutionary army began to be appreciated by successive French governments: such units would act as a focus for expatriates, as well as a haven for deserters from foreign armies and they could be expected to contribute to an undermining of nationalist opposition in those countries likely to be invaded by France. Thus preparations for the abortive French Expedition to Bantry Bay in 1796 had seen proposals for an Irish regiment placed before the Directory and some groups of Irish volunteers were formed from ex-prisoners of war. They proved unreliable however, and although Hoche's army included a Foreign Brigade, with at least two regiments commanded by colonels of Irish descent, it contained few Irishmen. The failure of the 1798 and 1803 insurrections in Ireland brought a number of Irish refugees to the Continent, Miles Byrne amongst them and following the renewal of hostilities between France and England, the formation of an Irish legion was commenced in Brittany later in 1803. It was intended that the unit should participate in an invasion of the British Isles, which was under active consideration at the time. The initial organisation of the legion was undertaken by Adjutant-General Bernard MacSheehy, an officer of Irish birth but with many years of service in the French army, who had undertaken a dangerous intelligence mission to Ireland in 1796. Byrne had a low opinion of his ability.

The original intention was that all the officers up to the rank of captain should be Irish, or of Irish descent, but this establishment proved impossible to maintain and the Irish character of the unit became increasingly diluted over the years. The rank and file appear to have been largely Polish and German prisoner of war, although there were some Irish too, such as a group of ex-'98 men, who had been imprisoned by the government in Ireland and subsequently sold to the King of Prussia as miners. Later they were recruited into the Prussian army and after becoming prisoners of war, volunteered to join the legion in 1806. Byrne gives biographical details of many of his fellow-countrymen in the legion and it is clear that they included not only ex-United Irishmen but former officers of the Irish Brigade and their descendants. The French historian Fieffé emphasises the concern of Henry Clarke, duc de Feltre, Napoleon's minister of war and himself the son of an Irish Brigade officer, for the welfare of the legion and his anxiety to support and maintain it: he quotes a letter from Clarke to Napoleon in which the minister stated "I have carefully combined United Irishmen with former followers of Stuart. This corps is a sort of scarecrow for England, always disquieting; and this is all that remains of that army which came to France after the capitulation of Limerick."

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The record consists of three separate accounts; one of the legion as a whole, one of its 3rd Battalion and one of its 4th (later 1st) Battalion. Some repetitiveness must be excused by the desirability of publishing the accounts in full.

THE HISTORICAL RECORD OF NAPOLEON'S IRISH LEGION

(Notice pour servir á l'historique du corps)

The regiment known as the Irish Legion was formed at Morlaix in the month of Frimaire, Year 12 (of the calendar adopted by the First Republic in France, i.e. late November/early December 1803). It joined Marshal Augereau's expeditionary army near Brest and was stationed in Brittany and on the Atlantic coast during 1803 and 1804. During 1805 it spent time inland, in various places. In December 1806, at Alençon, it received orders to proceed to Berlin. When it arrived at Mainz recruits were taken from passing columns of Polish prisoners, to a strength of about 1,800 men, forming a single battalion. This was sent to Landau, where it remained until March 1807. It then left the reserve army commanded by Marshal Kellerman to report to another at Boulogne, under the command of Colonel-General St. Cyr. For four months the regiment occupied the camps of Ostrowi, St. Léonard and Pont du Brique, whence it moved to Antwerp and remained there for about the same period in the Division Chaniberlac. It was then sent at the same strength to Walcheren Island, where it stayed until November 1807, during which time the commander-in-chief, Monnet, received orders to detach one battalion of the regiment for routing to Spain, under the orders of Marshal Moncey. The remainder of the corps at Flushing was reinforced forthwith and the battalion in Spain continued to serve under the Marshals Mortier and Bessières. By a decree dated 16 December 1808, that part of the regiment which was at Flushing was designated the 1st Battalion and the portion in Spain became the 2nd. Another decree of 13 April 1809 increased the establishment of the regiment to five battalions, one being the depot. Recruiting took place in the prisoner of war depots. The 3rd Battalion was formed on 1 June 1809 for service in Spain, while the 4th Battalion was brought to strength on 24 September 1809 and remained with the depot. On 15 August 1809, the 1st Battalion was taken prisoner at Flushing and by a ministerial decision of 9 May 1810 this battalion was reformed at Landau, on 17 June 1810, with the men surplus from the 4th Battalion. Some new, purely political measures taken by the government resulted in the posting of a number of prisoners of war to the various depots to help in the formation of new battalions. By decree of 28 June 1810 the regiment was reduced to two battalions, of which the 1st was formed from the 4th, which was at Landau and the 2nd from the 2nd and 3rd, which were in Spain. The surplus of officers and NCO's from the two battalions disbanded in Spain returned to France, where they joined the staff of the grand depot. In 1811 the regiment was designated the 3rd Foreign Regiment. It left Landau on 2 January of that year to report at Bois-le-Duc ('s Hertogenbosch) in Holland. In February 1812 three war battalions were formed, together with one depot battalion. The 1st Battalion occupied the islands of Goëré and Overflaqué, the 2nd was at Bergen-op-Zoom and the 3rd at Willemstadt. On 2 February 1813 the first two of the war battalions were ordered to report to the Grande Armée to join Lauriston's Corps. These two battalions returned to the depot at Bois-le-Duc during October 1813. The regiment was organised into four battalions and a depot on 19 December 1813. On 1 September 1814, at Avesnes, it was reduced to three companies and train. On 1 January 1815 it was organised at Montreuil into three battalions with a cadre of a fourth. On 9 June 1815 it was designated the 7th Foreign Regiment and on 29 September it was finally disbanded.

THE HISTORICAL RECORD OF 3RD BATTALION, THE IRISH REGIMENT

(Notice pour servir á l'historique du corps - 3e bataillon du Régiment irlandais)

The 3rd Battalion was formed at Landau on 1 June 1809 and completed to establishment during the following August. Its recruitment took place amongst Austrian prisoners who were en route to Strasbourg and Mainz and amongst the Irish in the English prisoner or war depots at Sarrelouis,

Napoleon's Irish Legion (Continued)

Bitche, Valenciennes, Arras, Cambrai, Philippeville, Givet and Mézières. The battalion finally consisted of as many Germans (sic) as of Irishmen, the majority of the latter being sailors. The English expedition against Flushing caused a forced march of this battalion, on 23 August 1809, to Juliers and from there to Maestricht. It left the latter place for Wesel on 22 September, as the English had abandoned their move on Antwerp. On 9 October, the battalion took the road for Spain, where they arrived on 1 December, after continual marches and counter-marches. Following its departure from Landau on 23 August 1809, these forced marches had prevented it from receiving many stores of which it was now short. Six hundred out of eight hundred were without arms, but received these en route. The combination of these circumstances naturally did great harm to the training and discipline of the battalion. Desertion manifested itself from the day of the original departure and took place principally amongst the Irish, or amongst the English who had enrolled under Irish names. On the whole the latter only left their prison camps in the hope of getting away, rather than being fired with the desire of serving His Majesty the Emperor. On arriving in Biscay, where the battalion was dispersed amongst many garrisons, its strength was reduced by desertion from 520 to 300, who were then sent to Bayonne. Shortly afterwards, on 14 December, the battalion assembled at Vittoria on the orders of Chef de Bataillon Mahony and on 16th it was part of the expedition of General Loison against the band of Marquisito guerrillas in the mountains of Arioca. It moved to Burgos on 8 January 1810. On 13 March a draft of 200 was received, the remains of a reinforcement unit from the depot at Landau and the 3rd Battalion was then at a strength of 500. It was part of the 2nd Brigade of the 3rd Division of the 8th Corps and in April was at the siege of Astorga, together with the 2nd Battalion of the Regiment, with which it was then joined. The élite companies of the battalion were also at the siege and reduction of Ciudad Rodrigo. On 1 June, Chef de Bataillon Mahony went onto the general staff of His Excellency the Duke of Abrantes (Junot). The battalion then joined the Portuguese expedition, commanded by the Prince of Essling (Massèna) and at the end of the campaign, being extremely reduced by desertion, it was turned into the 2nd Battalion at Torres Novas in Portugal on 10 November 1810. Its cadre was ordered to return to France, arrived at the depot in Bois-le-Duc on 17 June 1811 and was then amalgamated with the other parts of the corps.

THE HISTORICAL RECORD OF 4TH (LATER 1ST) BATTALION, THE IRISH REGIMENT

(Notice pour servir à l'histoire du corps - 4e bataillon du Régiment irlandais, devenu 1er bataillon)

In 1803 the hero, who was at that time governing the French as Consul, was preparing an expedition to Ireland. Sound politics suggested to him that he should form a corps of all the Irish who, fired by their civic feeling and love of their country (which was persecuted by the tyrannical English government), were forced to take refuge in France. Morlaix was the place designated for the assembly of all these Irishmen and it was in the month of Nivôse, Year 12 (late December/early January 1803/4) that they were organised under the title of the Irish Legion. This legion, which remained in Brittany during 1803 and 1804, was part of the Brest expeditionary army under the orders of General Augereau. However, new troubles in the north, aroused by the scheming of the British cabinet, caused the abandonment of the plans for invasion. Left in Brittany and burning to take part in the great deeds of the army, of which there had been many in Europe, they complained of their inactivity. The legion immediately received an order to move to Berlin. Having reached Mainz in the month of December, 1806, it found there an order to return to Landau. In this place its establishment was completed with Irishmen and Poles recruited amongst prisoners of war. At a strength, then, of 1,800 men, it was part of the reserve army under the orders of General Kellerman, when it was detached in March 1807 to go to Boulogne. There, for four months, it occupied the camps of Ostrowi, St. Léonard and Pont de Brique. It then crossed to the island of Walcheren. While in garrison there, it furnished a temporary battalion in November 1807, which was at once directed on Bayonne. There it joined the army commanded by Marshal Moncey which, shortly afterwards, entered Spain. This battalion continued to serve under the Marshals Mortier and Bessières and, in Spain, received a permanent establishment, following an Imperial Decree of 16 December 1808. This formed the Irish Legion into

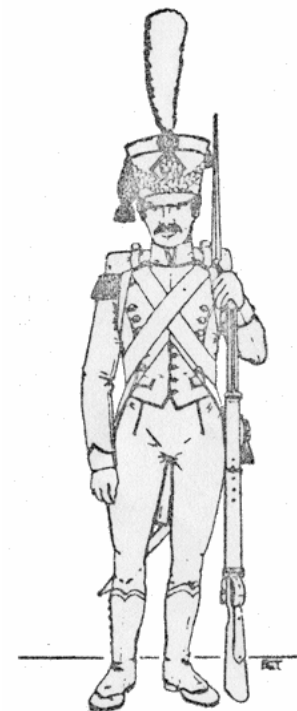
Napoleon's Irish Legion (Continued)

two battalions under the title of The Irish Regiment. As a result, this provisional battalion took the name of the 2nd Battalion of the regiment; the part of the corps from which it had been extracted and which was in Flushing, was entitled the 1st Battalion. Another decree of His Majesty, of 13 April 1809, took the composition of the regiment to five battalions of which one was the depot. These battalions had to be formed in proportion to the numbers of recruits taken from the various prisoner of war camps. In consequence of this decree the 3rd Battalion was organised on 1 June 1809 and, six weeks later, was sent to Spain. The 4th Battalion was then formed on 24 September 1809 and the men surplus to establishment made it possible, on 15 June 1810 to reorganise the 1st Battalion, which had been captured on 15 August 1809, when Flushing fell. Political measures forced the return of the prisoners, who had helped to form the new battalions, to the depots from whence they had come. The Irish corps was reduced to two battalions on 1 January 1811; i.e. the 4th Battalion became the 1st Battalion and the 2nd and 3rd Battalions in Spain formed the 2nd. The original 1st Battalion, whose conduct during the siege of Flushing had merited the general eulogies of those under whom it had served, was able - thanks to the gallantry and valour of its commander (Captain Lawless) and to the perils, to which it had exposed itself - to keep the Eagle which the great Napoleon had conferred on it. The 2nd Battalion had the honour, at the siege of Astorga on 21 August 1811, of mounting the first assault. The decorations awarded to many of these brave men commemorate the glory which the battalion acquired during this action.

Uniforms



PIONEER, 1811



RIFLEMAN, 1806-10

Napoleon's Irish Legion (Continued)

OFFICER OF GRENADIERS, 1806-10

Pioneer - Black bearskin cap, yellow crown with red grenade in centre; red cords and plume with tricolour cockade at base. Medium green tunic with yellow collar and turnbacks; each turnback having a red grenade. Medium green lapels with yellow piping. Red epaulettes and fringes. Brass buttons. White belts, straps, gauntlets, apron and axe-head case. Medium green breeches. Brass belt plate and fittings on cross belt; white sleeve insignia in the form of a grenade above crossed axes. Brass sword hilt with eagle head, black scabbard with brass tip; brown bayonet scabbard. White sling for musket. Axe; steel head, wooden shaft and brass tip. Grey rolled greatcoat and fawnskin knapsack. Black gaiters and black boots.

Officer of Grenadiers - Green tunic with yellow facings were the distinctive uniform colours of The Irish Legion, and remained so until the ordinance of 16 December 1814 decreed the uniform to be celestial blue with scarlet facings. Otherwise, the dress followed the same pattern as the line regulations of the French army. The uniform illustrated above comprises black shako with gold fittings and cords; red plume with tricolour cockade at base; black leather peak. Medium green tunic with yellow collar, lapels and turnbacks, each turnback having a gold grenade. Gold epaulettes and buttons. Gold gorget with a silver eagle. White waistcoat, sword-belt and breeches; chamois gloves. Gold sword-guard and knot; black scabbard with gold tip. Black boots.

Rifleman - Black shako with green plume and tricolour cockade at base; white cords; copper plate and black leather peak. Medium green tunic with yellow collar, lapels and turnbacks; each turnback having a green hunting-horn. Green epaulettes with red crescent and green fringes. Brass buttons. White waistcoat, belts and breeches. Brass sword-guard with green knot; black scabbard and brass tip; brown bayonet scabbard. Black gaiters with green borders; black boots. Grey rolled greatcoat and fawnskin knapsack. Black leather pouch. White musket sling.
[*This is obviously a voltigeur.*]

Napoleon's Irish Legion (Continued)

My Notes:

Uniform

The corps was of light infantry type and had chasseur, fusilier and carabinier companies. The original uniform was a green jacket with bright yellow collar, pointed lapels, pointed cuffs and turnbacks; the vertical pockets were piped in yellow and the turnbacks had green bugle horns. The waistcoat was white and green, tight-fitting pantaloons tucked into short black gaiters edged in red with a red tassel were worn. During the Consulate period, they wore a black bicorne with green feathers tipped red. Yellow buttons.

In 1811, the uniform was changed to a green "habit-veste". Sources differ to the placing of the distinctives:

	<u>Collar</u>	<u>Cuffs</u>	<u>Cuff-flaps</u>	<u>Pointed lapels</u>	<u>Turnbacks</u>
a)	Yellow	Dark Green	-	Dark Green	Dark Green
b)	Yellow	Yellow	Dark Green	Yellow	Red

All piping was yellow. The turnback ornaments were yellow bugle horns.

Black shako with brass plates and chin-scales. White cords.

Breeches and waistcoat were white as was the belting. Short black gaiters and boots. Yellow buttons.

Badges of rank and inter-company distinctions were as for French units with elite distinctives being top bands, cords, tassels and plumes to shako and fringed epaulettes to jacket of red or yellow as appropriate.

Standards

The first standard carried by the unit is described as green with an oval red tablet in the centre enclosed by a yellow border embellished by two green branches. On the red oval the inscription in yellow "LIBERTE/DES CONSCIENCES/INDEPENDENCES/DE L'IRLANDE" and in each corner a large gold Irish harp with silver strings. On the reverse side the standard had the same four harps but in the centre a circular wreath of golden oak leaves tied at the bottom with green ribbons and in the centre of the wreath a tablet divided in tricolour horizontally from the top blue/white/red. It was lettered across each panel "LE PREMIER/CONSUL/AUX IRLANDAISES/UNIS". The colour was carried on a simple staff with a gilded pike-head; it probably had a tricolour scarf.

In December 1805 the Irish Legion received its first eagle but, nevertheless, managed to maintain its tradition and retained the green standard. The pattern was, however, altered; on one side it was lettered in gold "L'EMPEREUR/DES FRANCAIS/A LA LEGION/IRLANDAISE" and on the other "INDEPENDENCE DE L'IRLANDE". The flags carried by the 2nd and 3rd Battalions in Spain did not have eagles. They were also green with a large golden harp in the centre of each side, on one side lettered "NAPOLEON AU 2^e BATAILLON IRLANDAIS" and on the other "INDEPENDENCE AU L'IRLANDE". The 3rd and 4th Battalions probably had similar flags.